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The Chinese Empire

A short history of China from Neolithic times to the end of the eighteenth century

JOHN A. HARRISON
author of *China Since 1800*

David L. Shaul

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John A. Harrison

THE CHINESE EMPIRE

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To my wife

Preface

It is a happy coincidence that this book is being published at a time when the People's Republic of China and the United States seem on their way to reversing their tragic relationship of the era 1949–1970. If, as I hope, increasing numbers of Americans become interested in China, as indeed they must, then it is also my hope that this book will be of service to them in their search for understanding of the Chinese past. *The Chinese Empire*, while a separate work, is complementary to my earlier history of modern China, *China Since 1800*, and both can be read with profit by those for whom they were written, students and laymen.

I gratefully acknowledge my obligations during the writing of this book to the following:

All those before me who have contributed to our knowledge of China—the great Chinese historians from the Han dynasty onward—and the outside observers of China, from Marco Polo in the thirteenth century to the scholars of the present.

Two scholars who meticulously read the draft of this work. One is anonymous, but he prepared for my publisher a careful and lengthy critique, which enabled me to avoid many errors. The other is my colleague, Professor John Knoblock, a brilliant young scholar whose microscopic analysis not only went beyond the call of friendship but was especially valuable in rewriting

the sections dealing with the pre-Chou period and with Buddhism.

Carol Levy, for her assistance in preparing the maps.

My wife, who uncomplainingly allowed me to devote the evenings and weekends of many years to study and writing. Without her there is nothing.

JOHN A. HARRISON

Coral Gables, Florida
June 1971

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THE CHINESE EMPIRE

PART I

THE ANTIQUITY OF CHINA

[1]

The Idea of the Past

There are three important points that the Western student has to keep in mind about the ancient history of China. First, more so than with any other great civilization, it is necessary to pay careful attention to the earliest periods. The whole pattern of Chinese life and thought was set in the ancient and classical times. Second, Westerners are used to the extensive documentation of the ancient history of their own civilization. In China there is almost a total lack of authentic historical materials stemming from earliest antiquity, and the enormous quantity of later materials on that period have limited value. Finally, the Western student must pick his way carefully through the varying and competing ideological interpretations of China's antiquity that have been advanced in the past two generations.

Such illumination as we now possess on the period prior to the first millennium B.C. has been brought about in the past forty years by the joint contributions of history, philology, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and all the tools of the social sciences. The results of this work destroyed a persistent, uncritical traditional view of the origins of China, but in its place arose an opposite and cynical viewpoint that held that there was no validity at all to the old legends and texts. Those scholars who have stood

aside from such extreme commitment and who are slowly and carefully researching the ancient past can show us still a third and more realistic view of antiquity. We shall see how these various views have come about, as they swing from belief to suspicion to real research.

> More than forty years ago when I was first admitted to the middle school I used to feel extremely happy to know that I was born in a country whose history had already lasted 5,000 years. . . . This was my understanding of China's past before the time of the Chinese Revolution.*

So Li Chi, the great Chinese archaeologist, wrote in 1955 on the traditional education of his youth.

The inculcation of respect and awe for antiquity was the hallmark of instruction in China for century upon century. The Chinese self-image was that of the geographical and cultural center of the world, of a country that was the stabilizer of all mankind and itself sufficient in every way. This perfection of "all under Heaven" was seen as a legacy from a remoter and wiser age, and it was guarded and guided by learned and virtuous men who adhered to the precepts of classical antiquity as seen in the accepted texts. Yet it was suspected as long ago as the tenth century that many, if not all, of the relevant texts were the products of later ages, each seeking to justify itself by rearranging the past.

Critical study of the texts was begun in the seventeenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth, extensive and careful textual criticism had produced a school of scholars who asserted that ancient texts had been combined and systematized to form an idealized picture of antiquity, and that absolutely no credence could be placed in their dogmatic teachings about the millennia prior to their time. Indeed many of the texts were later forgeries, and few could be dated earlier than the eighth century B.C. Then with the revolution and the renaissance in thought, language, and learning in China during the second decade of the twentieth century, a flood of skepticism poured down upon all accounts of the past. As Li Chi notes:

* Li Chi, *The Beginnings of Chinese Civilization* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1957), p. 3.

> After the revolution things began to change. There was a time when the reformers of China were skeptical about everything recorded in and about the past, including history itself.*

The men of the revolution, of the period beginning about 1912, were far more skeptical than their predecessors. Their general argument, as seen in that monument of revisionism, the *Ku Shih Pien* (a seven-volume series, "Discussions on Antiquity," published between 1928 and 1941), was that the history of antiquity was a synthetic creation of later ruling houses. Ancient scribes and philosophers had simply strengthened and justified their own points of view by manipulating an obscure past, deliberately creating superhuman rulers and sages whose presumed exploits and virtues would reinforce their own commandments and desires.

The revisionists were bitter and they had a right to be. The Chinese republican revolution had failed. Traditional ways of doing things and the traditional outlook upon the world had failed to preserve the integrity and stability of China, which was now weak, alone, and humiliated. They demanded a new learning and a new history. There was no particular uniformity in their re-examination of the past. Many of them mounted the horse Science and rode off without looking backward—or forward. Others approached the past from the standpoint of Marx, Spengler, Comte, or from more orthodox native grounds. Gone were the days of Li Chi's youth. Now men like Ku Chieh-kang declared that all ancient history was "an accumulation of fictions," and Ch'ien Hsüan-t'ung took the name "Mr. Doubter of Antiquity."

THE DISCOVERY OF ANTIQUITY

The 1920's and 1930's were exciting and revealing years for the ancient history of China. Not only were the Stone and Bronze ages discovered but, in 1927, the gap between these two ages was bridged by discoveries made at Ch'eng-tzu-yai. Then, between 1928 and 1937, Chinese scholars uncovered thousands of oracle bones. These are the shoulder and leg bones of oxen and the plastrons of turtles on which were inscribed questions addressed

* *Ibid.*, p. 4.

by kings to their ancestors. The bones were then heated by diviners, who interpreted the resultant cracking in the form of an answer from Heaven; occasionally the answers as well were inscribed on the bones.

The outlines of antiquity began to take form—not, of course, in the traditional way, but nevertheless the complete skepticism of the cynics was blunted. For one thing, they had assumed that the first great narrator of Chinese history, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, whose work in the first century B.C. was the mold in which all the later histories of China were cast, could not possibly have any source materials for the millennium before his own time; but inscriptions deciphered from the oracle bones uncovered at Anyang in 1928 yielded the names of twenty-three of the thirty kings of the Shang dynasty mentioned by Ssu-ma Ch'ien.

Meanwhile, between 1907 and 1930 a series of discoveries in far-western China added new dimensions to Chinese history. Sir Aurel Stein discovered at Tun-huang a library containing some 21,000 volumes dating from 406 to 995 A.D., among them the world's oldest printed book. Other discoveries of bamboo records, wood tablets, and manuscripts written on the world's oldest paper were made in the same area and date from as early as the second century B.C., enlarging the history of the period from the second century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D.

The material evidence was still fragmentary. The oracle bones, enormously valuable as they were, registered only the religious practices of the royal house, often in trivial terms, and the inscriptions on the ancient Shang bronzes uncovered were generally short and banal. Nevertheless, it prompted a new school of history, which pinned its hopes on archaeology and put its faith in a purely material interpretation of history. This was the materialist school of Kuo Mo-jo, whose *Study of Ancient Chinese Society* (1929) had enormous influence.

In 1937 the stimulating years of discovery were ended by the Japanese invasion of China. There was no time, no money, no manpower for the study of history. The libraries and museums of China were closed and their contents moved westward out of the path of the invader. The historians and archaeologists turned to the more pressing task of sheer survival.

THE NEW EVIDENCE

With the end of World War II the nature of politics in China made it inevitable that the materialist interpretation would triumph. Between bouts of denouncing capitalist archaeology, the Chinese Communists have carried on an investigation of the past with great vigor. Field workers and scholars have found traces of neolithic man from north to south and remains of Bronze Age civilization from the Shantung peninsula to the great bend of the Yellow River and to the Yunnan area. In 1951 Tzuyang man, dating from the late Pleistocene epoch, was discovered seven thousand miles southwest of the home of Peking man. Then in 1958 the oldest fossil representative of modern Chinese man found so far was dug up at Liukiang in Kwangsi province. Late that same year the earliest human fossil ever found except for Peking man was uncovered at Mapa in Kwangtung province in South China, and it was these later finds that proved the great range of early hominoids in China. We can now draw the inference, when considering all the finds since the time of the discovery of Peking man, that there was a wide distribution of early man over all eastern Asia, and it is more than interesting to note that the physical varieties thus far found are akin to the skeletal types of the American Indians. The Pleistocene period in East Asia may well have been a human reservoir that stocked not only China but the New World.

While the postwar Chinese archaeologists progressed, the historians retrogressed. The Marxist historians, led by Kuo Mo-jo, a noted and excellent scholar, had to fit the finds into the stale framework of a fixed predeterminism. At the same time the Nationalist government on Formosa was reacting to everything the Chinese Communists did and said, even in the field of antiquity, bringing about a patriotic resurgence on that island of the old legendary history. Therefore, at the date of this writing, perspectives on the history of antiquity are again polarized, but with the difference that now there is a safe middle ground for the noncommitted scholar. Indeed, if the real past of China is to be preserved and to have any meaning, it must now be kept alive in the West, for in China itself the study of history is being diverted

into the straight and narrow channels prepared for it by Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung. It is somewhat of a paradox that dedicated Chinese Communists, who are also profound Chinese nationalists, have to trim their history according to the modes of Western theoreticians, and the paradox is not lessened by the fact that these Communist scholars have little or no training in either Chinese or Western history but instead approach all history through the normative stages of Marxist development. This can best be seen by comparing their division of Chinese history with the way other scholars have divided it.

THE PERIODIZATION OF CHINESE HISTORY

Historians use arbitrary divisions of time called periods. As long as it is understood that these periods are not absolute and are constantly subject to revision, they have great value in the study of history. In the West we are familiar with such period divisions as ancient, medieval, Renaissance, Reformation, modern. Within the medieval period we further subdivide into early, high, and late medieval. As time goes on we tend to expand or contract the limits of a period, subdivide it further, or perhaps even eliminate it entirely and substitute something else, according to accepted evidence.

In China the traditional demarcation was by dynasties. There were twenty-five legitimate dynasties that ruled from legendary Hsia to the Manchu dynasty, which preceded the modern Republican period. For almost two thousand years the history of China was treated as that of a single perfect institution—a universal empire directly descended from a perfect state in remote antiquity. It was interrupted at times by ages of violence and disorder, but it always returned to the main track of legitimate, orderly, just, and benevolent government.

In recent times, with the introduction of Western ideas of history, the dynastic divisions were replaced with ancient, medieval, and modern periods, although there was much disagreement as to just when these periods should begin and end. Some Chinese tended to think of their history as comprising feudal, imperial, and modern periods, while others, such as H. T. Lei, divided it into two grand parts, the Classical, which ran from

remote antiquity to 383 A.D., when China north of the Yangtze was lost to the barbarians, and the Buddhist-Tatar, which ran from 383 to the present.

Yet another division of Chinese history has been proposed by the Japanese scholar Miyazaki Ichisada, developing the ideas of Naitō Torajirō. He divides Chinese history into four "ages": Age I, the establishment of an ancient empire; Age II, an aristocratic society; Age III, a period of autocratic government; and Age IV, a period of modernizing progress in East Asia. Age I extends from high antiquity to the Han period. Age II extends from Han to the end of the Five Dynasties period, during which great regional families were satisfied to be privileged aristocrats in the court without becoming feudal lords. Age III begins with the unification of the Sung dynasty and extends to about 1800. Age IV is marked by the invasions of the new culture of the West, which had the strength to destroy completely the traditional cultures of Asia. Naitō's most original insight was that China had reached its modern, as opposed to medieval, period in the early part of the tenth century—that is, it had changed from an aristocratic society to a despotism in which all power was centered in the emperor. In this change, he sees an analogy to the change in Europe from medieval feudalism to sixteenth-century royal absolutism, best illustrated in France.

Regardless of what aspects of history one used, whether economic or social or, as in the case of Lei, cultural, the fashion was to periodize, for it was obvious that the old dynastic divisions made no particular sense. However, despite their differences, all historians, with one exception, treated the body of the past as a complex living thing. The exception was, and is, the Communists, who treat it as a corpse. They view the past of China very simply as two thousand years of feudal stagnation, whose only significant inner divisions were the struggles of peasants against landlords in an earlier day and the struggle of the whole Chinese people against imperialists in the modern era. Ignoring the idea of contingency in history, the Chinese Communists claim that history unfolds in an inexorable and imperative manner according to Marxist tenets, and they label all Chinese history from the first millennium B.C. to about 1840 as the era of feudalism. The period

since 1840 is further subdivided into (1) the period of imperialism, from about 1840 to 1919, (2) the period of the New Democratic Revolution, from 1919 to 1949, and (3) the period of the People's Republic of China, from 1949 to the present.*

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF MAN AND HIS CULTURE IN CHINA

It is customary to begin a history of man with a note on his origins; that we have chosen instead to begin with his development means, simply, that we still know nothing of man's origins in China. The earliest men we have knowledge of are Peking man (*Sinanthropus pekinensis*), who lived and worked only some half-million years ago in the middle Pleistocene period, and the slightly younger Ting-ts'un man of the Yellow River. The Peking hominoid, who stood erect, made tools, and used fire, had already come a long way, and his roots may go back into the Pliocene period. His flaked stone tools are typical of old Stone Age industry in much of northern Eurasia from Scandinavia to Mongolia and, given his age, location, and material culture, one can hypothesize that the ancestors of the Chinese had been in China for thousands of years by the time the ice came.

With the great Ice Age there comes a break in our knowledge of human continuity in North China, and when the Ice Age is over there is a distinct change in man, his culture, and the face of China itself. What happened to old Stone Age culture from the time of Peking man to about 25,000 years ago has to be inferred from a few fragments from North China, where in 1933 at the site of Peking man the skulls and fragments of skulls of a number of later Stone Age people, dating from only some 50,000 years ago, were discovered. This Upper Cave Man had not only significantly advanced in culture, for he worked bone and horn as well as shell, but the skeletal criteria indicate a surprisingly

* The author of this text, in an effort to present the history of the civilization of China with reason, clarity, and authority, has been eclectic in the choice of sources, using those that seem to have the greatest value and dispensing with all formal ideas of periodization, choosing rather to represent that history in two broad divisions: (1) the time of the emergence and formation, and (2) the time of maturation, recognizing that in every case we are dealing with the tensions of both change and continuity. How change came about and how continuity persisted will be seen in the succeeding pages.

mixed population of ethnic types. The transition from early to late Stone Age has to be hypothesized also from a peripheral area, the Ordos, that area within the great bend of the Yellow River where there are extensive remains of a microlith culture, one of small, meticulously fashioned tools, which links up with microlith cultures from Manchuria all the way across Eurasia.

All evidence suggests a well-populated China by the end of the Ice Age, with the regional cultures pretty much established by the climate and the geography, in both of which the great glacial periods had made profound changes. The ice wall came to but did not cover the plains of North China, stopping at the mountains bordering China proper, but the great winds off the enormous Eurasia shield began the slow dessication of Mongolia, Central Asia and the Ordos regions. The climate in North China changed from subtropical to cool temperate, and the prevailing winds began their enormous deposit of a fine yellow clay dust and rock flour (loess), mostly in Shensi, Shansi, and Kansu provinces. The Ice Age was a hard environment for men in China. Some of them may have begun their slow migrations to Japan, South China, and the New World, while others in the Ordos became hunters dependent upon the occasional oasis in the dry steppe. In the great central plain cut by the Yellow River, where migration had swollen the population, there must have been the beginnings of agriculture and therefore of a civil society; for in an agricultural community, provided the yield of food is ample enough, a part of the population can leave farming and take up specialized tasks. This process probably developed gradually between 25,000 and 5,000 years ago.

Another, most important thing we know is that the culture of the Mongolian steppe could well have been an intruder on the Yellow River culture. For in the dry Mongolian north the oasis dwellers were from time to time pressed out of their natural habitat by extraordinary long dry seasons, and they must have looked with envy and desperation on the more fortunate farmers in the valleys and plains to the south. Naturally the mesolithic and early neolithic villages of the Yellow River country would resist any incursions from the hungry steppe dwellers, creating a pattern of periodic strife alternating with periods of peaceful exchange.

In surveying what we know of the local cultures at the end of the Ice Age, it is safe to say that two predominated—the steppe and the farm—and that the strife between nomad and settled, which is one of the great forces in Chinese history, had already begun. There were of course at that time other Stone Age cultures, the forest dwellers of Szechuan, the cave dwellers of Kwangsi, and the microlith culture of Sinkiang, which is an extension of the Gobi culture; but despite the many regional variations, the main emergent Chinese culture, the China we know, was created in the loess highlands and the flood plains of the Yellow River.

[2]

Neolithic Cultures

Neolithic cultures seem to have developed in a relatively restricted area of North China, which archaeologists have defined, by analogy with American archaeology, as the "nuclear area," comprising the region around the confluence of the Huang, the Fen, and the Wei rivers, where the modern provinces of Honan, Shansi, and Shensi meet. Throughout later Chinese history this area, known as Chung-yuan, has been an arena vital to control of all China. The core is a small basin, surrounded on three sides by land of higher elevations but open on the east to the North China plain. Because of the environmental diversity of this area, it presented optimum conditions for plant domestication and agriculture. Secondly, its location was strategic for communication. Thirdly, it is in this area that the only mesolithic assemblage was found. It thus is the place in North China where the transition might best be expected to have occurred.

Although Western archaeologists have often suggested that the development of agriculture in China and the rise of neolithic cultures was the result of diffusion from the much older neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of the West, there is no sound evidence to support this. Indeed, a number of distinctive features of Chi-

nese neolithic cultures suggest autochthonous developments. Among these are the following:

1. The cultivation of millet and rice as the basis of agriculture, rather than wheat and barley.
2. The use of stamped-earth construction.
3. The domestication of the silkworm.
4. Pottery tripods and steamers, suggesting a distinctive cooking style.

Out of this very early tradition, representing the beginnings of neolithic life, grew the first well-defined neolithic culture, the Yang-shao.

YANG-SHAO CULTURE

In 1921 the Swedish geologist J. G. Andersson discovered at Yang-shao a beautiful painted pottery that was distinctive of a whole neolithic assemblage. The Yang-shao, or Painted Pottery, culture began perhaps as early as 2500 B.C. It was based on farming, the staple food being millet, and on fishing. Using the slash-and-burn technique, farmers cut down and burned the vegetation, after which the land was prepared for sowing and planting. After a few years, when the fertility of the soil decreased, new areas were cleared and burned, and the old areas were abandoned and allowed to return to a natural state. The pattern of settlement was thus shifting, though confined to a relatively small area.

Besides several varieties of millet, wheat was cultivated, and near the end of the Yang-shao period, kaoliang and possibly the soybean. For clothing and other needs, farmers cultivated hemp and raised silkworms. To supplement these products, they gathered wild grains and raised dogs and pigs for food. There is evidence that cattle, sheep, and goats were also raised, though much less commonly. Hunting was a major source of supplementary food, and the game included such wild animals as horses, leopards, rhinoceroses, antelope, cattle deer, and marmots. But most important as a food source was fishing, which seems to have provided the vital protein of the diet.

Since Yang-shao farmers lived in small villages that moved with the need to prepare new fields but within the same general

area, sometimes occupying an old site again, the distribution of the culture is largely confined to the "nuclear area" and shows no evidence of regional differentiation. Pottery is handmade, utilitarian, and all arts are associated with domestic crafts. Tools include bows and arrows, spears, harpoons, and stone balls, but all appear to have been used only for hunting. There is little evidence of artifacts used for warfare or of defensive works. Religious beliefs are only poorly indicated, though the apparently symbolic burials of deer and the use of female symbols on pottery suggest a fertility cult intended to guarantee the abundance of animals and fish.

A study of the burial customs reveals no differences that would indicate stratification of population. However, this regularity, considered together with a seemingly lineal alignment of the cemetery, hints that the cult of ancestors may have been significant in the last phases of Yang-shao, though there is no unequivocal evidence until the next phase, the Lung-shan or Black Pottery culture.

LUNG-SHAN CULTURE

In 1928 the Chinese archaeologist G. D. Wu discovered at Ch'eng-tzu-yai, near Lung-shan in central Shantung, an archaeological assemblage characterized by a fine black pottery. Initially archaeologists thought this was an independent neolithic culture, but subsequent excavations showed it to be a development out of late Yang-shao, perhaps occasioned by pressures of a growing population. Lung-shan represents many changes from Yang-shao and is marked by an increasingly efficient agriculture, a more elaborate material culture, and development of social and political institutions based on social stratification. Also its culture was extended through a much larger area of China, resulting in regional variations.

In contrast to the shifting settlement and repetitive occupation of Yang-shao communities, Lung-shan villages were relatively permanent in both settlement and occupation. This implies that agricultural techniques were developed to counteract soil exhaustion: the use of fertilizers or fallow fields, or possibly both, and, in some contexts, irrigation techniques. Stability of com-

munities and greater agricultural productivity in turn caused population growth, which certainly accounts in part for the far-reaching expansion of the culture into the North China plain, northward to Manchuria, along the seacoast as far south as Hai-feng, and even across the Taiwan Strait.

The material culture of Lung-shan is much richer than that of Yang-shao. Pottery is wheel-made and extremely fine and thin. There is also evidence that vessels were made from other materials, such as wood and bamboo, and the very sharp curves of the pottery hint at the use of metal. In the most advanced communities the fine, lustrous, wheel-made black pottery was no longer primarily functional but was probably used as ceremonial ware and in religious rituals. From the evidence of jade artifacts, differential burials, and scapulimancy or bone divination, it appears likely that occupational specialties existed, as well as distinctions in class and status.

THE TRANSITION TO SHANG CULTURE

The coming of Shang civilization brought significant changes to China. For one thing, there was a clearer class differentiation. For another, in some areas villages became urban centers, thus creating the institutions that are associated with urban living. Similarly, the extension of formal political power seems to indicate that there were new governmental forms involving conquest, tribute, and redistribution of resources. Economic institutions and patterns were accordingly modified. Wider trade, prompted in part by the need to obtain new materials such as mineral ores and turtle plastrons for divination, involved the establishment of currency. Metallurgy became common for ceremonial vessels used by higher levels of society. There were improvements in stone-carving techniques, writing, and warfare, including the introduction of chariots.

The archaeological record, though it recognizes discontinuities, tends to suggest an uninterrupted lineal development between previous neolithic cultures and Shang civilization. But this view can be supplemented by an interesting sociological-anthropological approach, which, using every historical, archaeological, linguistic, and social tool at hand, starts to work with

those periods of Chinese history where evidence is abundant and then moves backward to the shadowy periods, skillfully interpolating legends, cultural traits, and traditions. It assumes, for example, that certain legends of the Chou dynasty of the first millennium B.C. represent cultural traits of much earlier groups. These groups are then placed geographically by a study of the cultural terms and traditions embodied in the various legends, on the theory that entire ethnic groups do not migrate. Wolfram Eberhard sets the number of these local groups at nineteen and asserts they overlap so much that there is no such thing as a "Chinese" culture prior to Shang.*

This hypothesis conflicts with the archaeological theory of a single pre-Shang proto-Chinese culture in the Yellow River basin. (Although both sociologist and archaeologist do agree on the emergence of Chinese culture from separate sources, the one argues from a sequence of cultures identified by pottery types, the other from a concurrence of local cultures.) The sociologists state that there is really no conflict because, whatever the integrating factor, it can be shown easily that new cultures do arise from the interaction of varying cultures. This is a persuasive theory, because it is known that in other areas at other times exactly this kind of thing did happen. It is not necessary, say its proponents, to assume that a "Chinese" culture existed at all times. It makes more sense to assume that, from a multitude of evidence of local tribal and clan traits of the neolithic period, there was a transformation by conquest sometime in the second millennium B.C., that in the central Chinese plain there emerged a syncretic culture containing all the elements that later remained typical of the Chinese, and that by the end of the second millennium B.C. the high culture of North China was indisputably "Chinese."

This is a one-sided and tentative approach to the question of the birth and emergence of a Chinese civilization, but it is a necessary and useful approach, and when correlated with all other evidence it rids us of two traditional conceptions—one, that a full-blown Chinese civilization originated in remote antiquity

* Wolfram Eberhard, "The Formation of Chinese Civilization According to Socio-Anthropological Analysis," *Sociologus,* Vol. 7 (1957), pp. 97–112.

and spread inexorably in all directions; two, that the "Chinese" immigrated into this area from the west, conquered the resident barbarians, and gave them their imported culture. The first is ridiculous on the face of it and the second is implausible considering the evidence of a widespread proto-Chinese neolithic population in China.

The fact is that in the middle of the second millennium B.C. we have a well-populated river basin with a late neolithic culture showing a wide variety of traits, methods, and artifacts, and by about 1000 B.C., on the rim of an advanced Bronze Age, we clearly discern a truly Chinese civilization. For unlike the later Shang, none of the local neolithic cultures was a high civilization and none had an organized state with an organized administration. Shang civilization comes into full view about 1500 B.C., and since we know that the period 2000 to 1500 B.C. was a turbulent one in western Asia and that at that time fighters equipped with horse and chariot conquered Near Eastern civilizations, why not assume, says one theory, that the war techniques of these groups penetrated eastward? This would enable some local cultures that already had the horse to apply the arts of bronze to the art of war and to become conquerors of the fruitful farm settlements of the great central plain. They would remain as fighters and administrators rather widely dispersed over a conquered people, allowing their subjects to continue as farmers while they settled in defensible walled villages.

These hypotheses could account for the Shang-Chou city, the political and military structure of Shang, the puzzling shift during the late Shang era from a social pattern of clan relationships and fraternal connections to a system of primogeniture and patriarchism with its respect for the aged, and a shift from an apparent federal union of tribes to a principle of authority. It would make sense out of the long, slow shift from a local system to a semi-metropolitanism and the growth of a cyclical gradation of authority, a radial gradation of administration, and the use of moral sanctions, all of which are essential characteristics of Chinese civilization.

[3]

The Matrix of Chinese Civilization — Shang

Shang is the first step in the long epoch, lasting over two thousand years, when China's life and destiny are formed and all things basic to Chinese civilization become recognizable—an epoch that ends with the mature Chinese state and empire. Although some things for which Shang is notable will, unaccountably, seem to come to an end in the first millennium, the fundamental elements will persist—the seeds of the social institutions, the religious beliefs, and the political and economic order. These elements are only partially visible, for while we know a good deal about the material conditions and products of Shang man, we have only the briefest of glimpses of his political organization and religious ceremonials, and we know nothing of what he thought, only of what later dynasties assumed he thought. The problem is how did these semi-primitive neolithic communities slowly transform themselves into a high civilization that must have had an effective political organization over a wide area?

The differentiation between Shang civilization and its neolithic antecedents is most notable in three areas of accomplishment, each of which requires some comment: bronze metallurgy,

writing, and the use of chariots. It is commonly asserted that the use of bronze begins abruptly with the emergence of Shang civilization, for there is no prior evidence of it, and that therefore, since Shang bronze casting is the most highly skilled in the ancient world, its refined techniques must have required a long tradition of development. The absence of such a tradition has led scholars to insist that bronze metallurgy originated in the West, but recent detailed studies of bronze casting has led some Western and most Chinese scholars to conclude that it was indigenous to China and was independently invented there.

Writing, too, has been attributed to influences from western Asia, based on similarities observed between forms of archaic Chinese characters and forms of archaic Egyptian hieroglyphs and Sumerian ideograms. Such similarities are not, however, convincing, for they rarely exceed the degree of correspondence that simple imitation of the same natural object would produce. A more serious argument is that the writing on the Anyang oracle bones employs sophisticated principles of writing, equivalent to a period of about a millennium of development in Sumer, from which all other systems of writing develop by direct influence of stimulus diffusion. Herrlee Creel, in *The Birth of China,* notes:

> . . . in fact, every important principle of the formation of modern Chinese characters was already in use, to a greater or lesser degree, in the Chinese of the oracle bones, more than three thousand years ago.*

Although no archaic oracle inscriptions exist showing a more primitive use of characters, i.e., purely pictographic characters, among the Anyang inscriptions, there are a few examples of archaic characters presumably used for ritual purposes, much as seal characters were later employed in China.

Thus, though there is evidence for an independent development of writing, it can hardly be regarded as conclusive. (On the other hand, not a single piece of evidence has been advanced to support the hypothesis of diffusion of writing from Mesopotamia.) One should note, however, that the requirements of

* H. Creel, *The Birth of China,* 3rd printing (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1954), p. 160.

oracle-bone divination, which had its antecedents in Lung-shan, provided an inspiration for writing, much as the requirements for temple and economic records in Sumer provided the stimulus for the invention of writing there.

The chariot, on the other hand, has no antecedents in the Lung-shan culture, being alien to both its social organization and its mode of warfare. Thus, it might well have been an importation from the West.

The patterns of Shang settlement are clearly distinguishable from the neolithic villages of Lung-shan times. Villages tended to be grouped together and to be specialized in function. Residential farming communities differ little from their neolithic predecessors, but within the same area there were other communities devoted to activities such as administration, religion, handicrafts, and aristocratic burials. In ceremonial centers, architecture featured rectangular structures, stamped-earth floors, stone foundations, and stone sculpture. In burial areas, there were complex systems of graves including extraordinarily large tombs, sophisticated in design and workmanship beyond any neolithic structure. The tombs are associated with burials of human sacrifices, chariots, horses, and artifacts of pottery and bronze. In addition to village settlements, there were major cities, which had not appeared before this time. At present three such cities are known: Cheng-chou, Anyang, and Hsing-t'ai. Of these, Anyang provides the best and most complete picture of the latter parts of the Shang period, while Cheng-chou alone presents the whole archaeological sequence.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF SHANG

Cheng-chou, discovered in 1950, consists of five levels. The lowest represents the transition from Lung-shan to Shang and is only poorly defined. In the second level, we see the pattern of residential farming villages and specialized villages. Typical Shang cultural traits have increased, but the total assemblage includes strong reminiscences of Lung-shan features, and no metal has been found, indicating perhaps that it was still rare. This stage is imperfectly represented, and further excavations will undoubtedly clarify the sequence of developments in the emergence

of Shang from Lung-shan. In the third level of Cheng-chou, the rich cultural assemblage associated with Shang becomes evident. Within the area are clear dwelling-house areas, burial areas, quarters for craft workshops, and most significantly, a city wall. It has been theorized that only the aristocrats and royal family lived within the city wall, and that beyond it were the dwellings of the various craft specialists and farmers on whom the structure of the state rested. Literary records dating from a millennium after this period suggest that this site may have been the ancient Shang capital Ao. The size of the city and the presumed complexity of social organization have been graphically described by the archaeologist An Chin-hui, who calculates that to build the wall would have required the efforts of no less than ten thousand men digging earth, transporting it to the wall, and compressing it into the stamped-earth forms, working 330 days a year for not less than 18 years. To organize and support so large a number of men requires a degree of social control far beyond the capabilities of the neolithic communities. The upper two levels at Cheng-chou coincide with the features of Anyang, which seems to have become the center of Shang culture.

The chronology of the Shang dynasty is still a matter of dispute, but present evidence suggests that, as a coherent political and social organization, it dates from *ca.* 1500 to 1027 B.C. Some five stages can be distinguished on the basis of the Cheng-chou stratigraphy and approximate dates can be assigned:

I. Transition from neolithic to Shang: 1900–1700 B.C.
II. Early Shang, state political organization: 1700–1500 B.C.
III. Dynastic Shang, capital at Ao and other sites: 1500–1300 B.C.
IV. Middle Shang, capital at Anyang: 1300–1135 B.C.
V. Late Shang: 1135–1028 B.C.

Each of these five periods is marked by significant changes in patterns of settlement, material culture, or political and social patterns.

Stage I represents the transitional period between Lung-shan and Shang, which has already been discussed and is probably

MONGOLIA
KANSU
Ordos Desert
SHANSI
Fen R.
Yellow R.
WEI
Sheng
CH'IN
Wei R.
HAN CHENG
HONAN
SHENSI
Sian Chang-an
Loyang
Huai R.
CH'U
CHEKIANG
SZECHUAN
Ch'engtu Plain
FUKIEN
TAIWAN
KWANGTUNG
LING-NAN
TONKIN
Red R.
THE MATRIX OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

marked by the change from chiefdoms to regional states and incipient urbanization, and possibly by introduction of metallurgy.

Stage II perhaps corresponds to the period indicated in the oracle bones and literary records of the Shang royal ancestors, who go back some fourteen generations before the foundation of the dynasty. Presumably this was a period of regional states, sharing common cultural assemblages and institutions. At least one passage in the ancient *Book of Odes* may be suggestive of this period. One of the royal ancestors, called "Hsiang T'u, the ardent," who ruled twelve generations before T'ang, the founder of the Shang dynasty, is said to have spread his dominion. It may be that the legendary Hsia dynasty was one of the several states with which the Shang state competed for dominion until T'ang finally achieved the goal about 1500 B.C.

Stage III represents the earliest period of the Shang dynasty, as distinct from the archaeological assemblage called Shang. It is presumably to be linked with T'ang's conquest, recorded in the later literature and indicated on the oracle-bone records. At this time the culture of the Shang is clearly indicated. Urbanization is present, social organizations are efficient and involve significant capacity to direct and control the population, and the individual villages are organized into networks in the economic, administrative, and religious structures of the society. There is a capital, the political and ceremonial center, which, in collecting and redistributing goods, serves as an administrative and economic focus of the empire. The population is considerable, though no Shang site can compare with the urban densities of Ur in Sumerian times or with Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus Valley culture. In their function as political and ceremonial rather than commercial centers, Shang cities differ from those of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, and perhaps more closely resemble Mayan ceremonial centers.

For Stages IV and V there are excellent records from Anyang, the most carefully and extensively excavated site in China. The abundant oracle-bone records, of which some forty-one thousand have been published, permit a more complete reconstruction (though not as much as had been expected) of society than is possible for earlier times. On the basis of the oracle records, it seems probable that Shang dynastic control extended over the

area of the modern provinces of Honan, Hopei, and Shantung and to the northern parts of Anhui and Kiangsu.

The Shang hierarchy consisted of three groups: the aristocracy, the craftsmen, and the farmers. Of these, the aristocracy is best known. According to the archaeologist Chang Kwang-chih, the royal branch of the ruling clan in Shang times consisted of no fewer than ten lineages. Of these, two, the Ting and the Yi, were of special importance and enjoyed the highest status, and royal power tended to alternate between them. The other branches were generally allied with one of these two, but at least two lineages were neutral. Some Shang rulers conferred territory on their wives and sons, on prominent ministers, and on a number of unnamed persons who are given the noble titles *hou, po,* or *nan,* conventionally translated as marquis, earl, and baron.

Hu Hou-hsüan, the historian, interprets these grants of land as a feudal system and believes that the titled persons were vassals of the Shang king. He distinguishes five duties that they were expected to perform in return for the land: (1) defending the Shang empire, particularly against the barbarian tribes at the fringes of the empire; (2) participating in expeditions against rebels; (3) giving tributes of tortoise shell and local products; (4) paying taxes of millet and other grains; and (5) supplying labor for cultivation of the king's land and for large-scale public works such as city walls.

In addition to persons belonging to the aristocratic ranks and holding the titles mentioned, there were also chieftains of barbarian tribes over whom Shang kings exercised no direct power but to whom a title (*fang*) was granted, perhaps as an instrument of control. In the reigns of Wu Ting and Ti Hsin some twenty-six *fang* chieftains and eight tribes are mentioned. Relations with these chieftains were not always harmonious, and there are numerous accounts of expeditions against them. Whether feudalism, as a formal hierarchal system, developed in Shang is still a matter of debate, but clearly the antecedents of western Chou feudalism are to be found in the Shang period.

The Shang dynasty distinguished five regions: the capital and its immediate environs, which were conceived to be the center of the empire and possibly, as in later China, the center of the world as well. The other regions were named after the

direction in which they lay: Eastern Territory, Southern Territory, Western Territory, and Northern Territory. Shang records also distinguish between cities, called large towns (*Ta-i*), and towns (*i*). A Shang town consisted of its central area (*p'i*), its suburbs (*tien*), and its surrounding fields (*t'ien*). The political ideology of the Shang dynasty apparently considered the country to consist of three concentric circles with the Shang center forming the core, surrounded by the Four Territories, and the barbarian tribes forming the outermost circle. Political power radiated from the center as did the culture. This ideology, inferred from the terminology employed in the oracle records, conforms to later Chinese ideas.

SHANG POLITICAL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The government of the Shang period is only dimly visible in the terminology of the oracle records, but three types of offices may be discerned: civil, military, and secretarial. The civil authorities, as far as can be determined, include persons referred to as officials and "upright" persons. Military officials include persons in charge of horses, archery, guard duties, and dogs. Secretarial officers, more clearly indicated, consist of councilors, chroniclers, priests, and diviners. The duties of the chronicler include not only keeping official records, composing royal documents, and maintaining archives, but also recording astronomic events and preparing the calendar. The diviners were concerned with making pronouncements on a wide variety of subjects, from the vitally important to the trivial. Because the oracle-bone records are the primary source of our information, the names of more than a hundred diviners are known. Priests officiated at the rather intricate sacrificial rites and were sometimes sent abroad as ambassadors. The organizations of the various smaller units of government appear to have been similar to that of the royal court.

Military organization of the Shang state was complex and well organized. The kings maintained both an army of chariots and one of infantry. Each chariot carried three men: a driver who stood in the center, an archer on his left, and a warrior with a dagger-ax on his right. Chariots were supported by foot soldiers to form a striking force. Armies, raised to meet specific threats, usually ranged between three and five thousand men, though they

might number as many as thirty thousand. In peacetime the Shang kings maintained only a royal guard. In a particularly detailed record of the campaign of Ti Hsin, the last Shang king, against the Jen-fang barbarians in the east of the empire, Ti Hsin claims to have killed 2,656 enemy soldiers in the 260-day campaign. Other oracle bones record numerous military encounters with hostile peoples who seem to have lived primarily in the east and southeast, where, presumably, Shang culture had been spreading for some years. Indeed, the successive changes of the capital during Shang times may suggest a move of the center of power northwards and eastwards during the latter years of the dynasty.

Closely associated with military operations and providing training for troops were the great hunting expeditions undertaken by Shang kings. Accounts of 39 different hunts are recorded in the reign of Wu Ting and an incredible 311 hunts during the reign of Ti Hsin. These accounts also refer to 95 different hunting grounds. The scale of these hunts was quite large. On one such occasion, for example, the bounty included a tiger, 40 deer, 164 foxes and badgers, and 159 hornless deer.

The social organization of the Shang aristocracy was quite complex. In addition to the ten lineages associated with the royal clan, no less than two hundred clan names, constituting the warrior-aristocracy, are mentioned in the oracle-bone records. The family structure of the aristocracy was strictly patrilineal and the birth of sons regarded more highly than that of daughters. In the royal clan a major and a minor branch of the royal lineage were distinguished, depending on the directness of descent. The eldest prince would normally be designated crown prince, but some kings recognized more than one heir.

Nothing is known of the social and family organization of the common people, farmers, and craftsmen. Captives taken in campaigns against the barbarians became slaves, working in the fields, and were often used as victims for ceremonial sacrifices. The life of the warrior-aristocrats was vastly different from that of the farmers and craftsmen. The former enjoyed the benefits of the advanced culture of Shang, while the latter continued in much the same pattern of life as had their predecessors in neolithic times, metals not yet having been applied to farming implements.

Though the details are not clear, there is reason to believe that the Shang kings in the last part of the dynasty were attempting to consolidate their power and to extend the realm. Their relations with the Chou peoples of the west, who would ultimately conquer Shang, are revealing in this respect. In the reign of Wu Ting, the Chou are already a people of significance. The center of the Chou state was in western Shensi, along the upper courses of the Ching and Wei rivers. The local Chou ruler apparently recognized the sovereignity of Wu Ting and was given the title marquis (*hou*). Subsequent records mention a punitive expedition against the Chou that was joined by other tribes of the west. The Chou paid tribute to the Shang kings, and Shang princesses were given to Chou chieftains in marriage.

Ti Hsin, the last Shang king, was vigorous in the application of royal power. He was apparently confronted with a number of attacks by the eastern and southeastern barbarians, whom he vigorously pursued. That he was also concerned with the rising power of the Chou is shown by the fact that when the Chou chieftain Ch'ang paid a visit to his court, he was arrested and imprisoned for three years. Later, apparently when Ti Hsin was occupied with a major campaign against the eastern barbarians, the Chou people attacked and defeated him. The defeat of the Shang ended the empire.

To later historians, Ti Hsin became the stereotype of the debauched dynastic ruler. So great were his sins, it was thought, that Heaven itself had called upon the Chou people to put an end to the dynasty and establish a new line. The *Historical Memoirs* characterize him thus:

> Ti Hsin was of quick discernment, gifted with acute senses, mental ability far in excess of the ordinary, and physical strength of brutal order. Knowledge enabled him to keep remonstrance at a distance; eloquence enabled him to gloss over his vicious acts. Boasting to his subjects of his ability, and exalting his empire by clamoring, was to him the means to make himself prominent. He loved the pleasures of the cup and debauchery, and was infatuated with his consort, the beloved T'a-chi whose words he obeyed.*

* F. Hirth, *Ancient History of China to the End of the Chou Dynasty* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1908), p. 56 (modified).

[4]

Writing and Meaning

"Out of the river Lo crept the half divine tortoise having on its back a mysterious writing. . . ." So starts the legend on the origin of writing, although Fu Hsi, the legendary founder of Chinese writing, developed only the notched tally stick. True writing is attributed to Tsang Chieh, a minister of the Yellow Emperor, who, having observed the shape of things in the heavens and the forms of things on earth, developed the written symbol. Chinese writing was pictographic in origin; that is, it conveyed to the reader in a pictorial form something in the world of perception—unlike the phonetic writing of Indo-European languages, which indicates the sound but offers no clue to the meaning, thus excluding anyone without knowledge of the spoken language. The nature of Chinese writing permits anyone who masters the characters to read Chinese without knowing a single sound of the language.

Its origin is very old, for what we have in the Shang script is already an advanced writing. Indeed, there are two levels of writing development discernible in Shang. The inscriptions in bronze are in what was an old script even in Shang times, probably still used for aesthetic purposes. The inscriptions on bone are in the "modern" Shang script. Only the bone and bronze have

survived time and the weather. We know that other records were kept on bamboo, silk, and wood, but they have vanished. What remains is considerable, for over a hundred thousand different inscriptions in Shang writing are known, ranging from long legends on great plastrons to fragments of writing on bits of shell. About three thousand separate characters have been catalogued, of which about eleven hundred have been deciphered. A good many of the inscriptions are on "oracle bones." As difficult as these are to read, even for experts, they are unmistakably in an advanced script, which had by this period become quite sophisticated and had lost the pictorial quality.

In the original primitive script, each graph had direct, easily comprehensible relationship to the thing that it represented. Although it was possible to make a great many pictures of objects and of abstract ideas, there was a limit to the number that could be meaningfully constructed, and since the meaning was independent of the sound, it was difficult to create a written equivalent for a word already in the spoken vocabulary. Furthermore, such writing was limited pretty much to generalities and lacked the capacity to communicate details. This was solved when a phonetic principle was introduced to the written language. Thus a part of the character gave a clue to the meaning and a part gave a clue to the sound. For example, there is a graph representing "water" in general. By joining to it graphs that had the sounds denoting particular bodies of water, one could easily put down separate ideographs for an ocean, a lake, a river, a creek, a bay, etc.

There is practically no limit to the creation of such graphs. Early as Shang writing was, it was quite capable of expressing complex ideas; and even then the structure and nature of the Chinese language already seems fixed, although only with the second millennium B.C., which has left us a copious literature, can an exact judgment on the language be made.

Chinese is uninflected. That is, the form of a word does not change in order to show distinctions of gender, number, tense, person, etc. There is no distinction between singular and plural. There are no cases and hardly any words that correspond to English relative pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions. There

are no fixed forms for mood or tense in verbs. Also, the words are almost completely monosyllabic, and therefore the language contains an enormous number of homophones or words that sound exactly alike.

On the other hand, Chinese is very rich in words that express objects and forms. Unlike English, in which a complex abstraction would be expressed analytically, Chinese expresses the same thing by a series of concrete images. Although this imagery is capable of direct and powerful expression, it can also be highly ambiguous. Because of this ambiguity, all of the great classic works in philosophy, much in literature, and even in history demand critical explanation and interpretation.

The word order was fixed in Shang times as subject-verb-object (although quite frequently in Chinese the subject can be omitted). The function of each character thus is often determined not by its intrinsic meaning but by its position and by context.

There were various styles of writing, although generally the lines of characters were written in columns running from top to bottom and from right to left, and there were variant ways of writing the same character. We do not know the sounds of Shang Chinese, or whether there were dialects, but the principles of the classic written Chinese language are present.

[5]

Heaven, Earth, and Man

We can investigate the beliefs and aspirations of existing cultures, but in the case of prehistoric man this knowledge is irretrievably lost; concerning his gods we know and can know nothing. Shang is an in-between case. Our knowledge of Shang man's understanding of the universe has to be largely inferred from later practices, but we also have substantial evidence from the oracle bones, from the material civilization, and from our knowledge that men whose very lives depend upon the cycle of the seasons and the beneficence of nature, come to have a common understanding about natural phenomena.

Shang man was a keen and excellent observer of the heavens. He recorded lunar eclipses—five of them (1373, 1344, 1311, 1282, 1279) can be dated—he devised and used the sun dial, and he constructed an elaborate annual calendar whose promulgation was an integral right of the priest-ruler. In this agricultural economy, astronomical knowledge was of prime importance as the regulator of the calendar, and there was therefore an intimate connection between astronomy and statecraft. Chinese astronomical records preceded those of Babylon.

The Shang year was divided into two parts, each of which ran from solstice to solstice. The days were divided into seven

(later ten) parts, from sunrise to sunset. The nights were not divided. A day and a night was the period dawn to dawn. The days each had names and were counted in units of ten, and these units of ten were themselves counted in units of ten: 10 days were 1 *hsun,* and 10 *hsun* were a *pai.* However, the fundamental time cycle was six units of 10 days, or 60 days. There were "months" or lunar periods of 30 days and of 29 days, which generally alternated over a "year" of twelve lunar periods, but because it was necessary to adjust the lunar cycle to the solar year, an extra period was added to the calendar at the necessary intervals, generally every three years. The solar year itself was computed to be about 365¼ days in length, and the year was generally computed in repeating cycles of 60 days.

From this close observation of the heavens and of the interconnection of the procession of the heavenly bodies with the seasons, there arose the over-all concept of Heaven itself as well as the animation of the observable physical phenomena. And since Heaven affected Earth, there arose a group of heavenly deities and a group of earthly deities. The heavenly pantheon included the gods of the clouds, the wind, the stars, and the moon, all under the greatest of deities: the dispenser or withholder of rain, the Omnipotent One, Shang-ti. These gods were not conceived of in man's likeness and no sacrifices were made to them, but the other pantheon, that of Earth, was personified and sacrificed to. These were the gods of the four directions, the rivers, the mountains, and the Yellow River, all under Ti, the god of Earth.

In the rather small heavenly pantheon of ancient China, by far the most important deity was Shang-ti, the giver of rain and therefore the giver of victory or disaster, good or bad fortune. With the emergence of the idea of an Omnipotent One, Shang-ti, there also came the idea of Heaven (*T'ien*) as the Cosmos, the whole natural order.

It is not strange that the forces of Heaven and Earth should be deified and play a large part in primitive Chinese religion. They played the same part in the life of all farming peoples, and the Chinese were more desperately aware than most peoples that their land needed rain to be fruitful. Without rain, loess is dust.

In North China rain must fall in the spring and the summer and in the right amounts—above all not too much, lest the land be flooded out. It was necessary, therefore, to appeal to the forces of Heaven and Earth, to placate them, and to seek to maintain a balance between man and nature.

The placation of Heaven and Earth was accomplished through the intercession of one's ancestors. Certainly the most important external aspect of Shang religion was ancestor veneration, at least for the royal family, for the religious rites we know of are those that were directed to the ancestors of the kings. For the Chinese the dead still lived in spirit and were endowed with supernatural powers. This concept was in part responsible for the extraordinary hold that filial piety had upon the Chinese; as far as the ancestral cult was concerned, there was little distinction between living and dead, since the family also existed in the other world.

Chief among the powers of the dead was the ability to enter at will the worlds of Heaven, Earth, and Man. Therefore, it was deemed possible and prudent to use the ancestors to intercede with the deities of Heaven and Earth through correct ritual, prayer, sacrifice, or other device, of which the priest was the proper judge. Ancestor veneration was a complex affair, because the relationship between worshiper and worshiped was a family one. Furthermore, since the patrimony of the dead was such that the chief ancestor of Shang was also the remote original ancestor of the royal house itself, the king of Shang interceded with his great ancestor Shang-ti not only for himself but for his people.

At some very early time a division in rank was made between the ancestors of the Shang common people and those of the leaders. This is somewhat analogous to the development of the Japanese pantheon, where we know with more certainty that as a single clan or group of clans ascended to temporal power over the other clans of Japan, so did its chief family divinity become the chief divinity for all.

A significant political factor evolved from the relationship between the king and his great ancestor. For in Chou times it was clearly stated, and we find the earliest reference to it in the *Book of History,* that Heaven sanctions the temporal rule. This is the

idea of the "Mandate of Heaven," which means, in short, that the ruler is entrusted by Heaven with the welfare of his people. This proclamation may well have been made by later Chou conquerors as a prop to the legitimacy of their conquest. But grave concepts like this do not come into being full-blown or contrary to general beliefs and practices. Therefore the idea of the Great Mandate must have long existed, at least as a sense that the permanence and legitimacy of any rule depended on its moral worth and that Heaven was the only judge of that worth.

In any such covenant binding Heaven to man, Heaven by its very nature cannot violate its own covenant. So it was necessary to justify Heaven when natural appearances were against it, and at the same time to show that man and particularly the emperor had violated the contract. Therefore, from a very early date there came about in China a peculiarly intimate relation between history and ethics.

This is where the previous analogy to early Japan ceases, for in Japan the temporal order was ruled by a direct descendant of the greatest of the gods. Since this descendant was partially divine, he could do no wrong. But in China, while a line of descent was recognized between the ruler and the remotely ancestral divinities, none was recognized between the king and Heaven itself. In China, the king interceded with divinity. In Japan, the emperor *was* divinity. Furthermore, in China the Mandate was bestowed on a ruling house only once, and its continuance depended upon the well-being of the people.

The whole complex of religious activity in ancient China, which was the concern of the rulers and nobility assisted by the religious, continues without a break in the initial century of the Chou dynasty. As a matter of fact there is continuity in all the fundamental institutions. One can discern, despite the end of certain Shang phases, the perpetuation of economic and social practices, political order, and family life, as well as religious beliefs, ancestor veneration, and theism.

[6]

The Chou System

Sometime in the first quarter of the eleventh century B.C. the powerful Chou tribes of the Wei River valley began to press into the Shang territories to the east. The rich and civilized Chinese states of the central plain were a tempting prize for the Chou frontiersmen. Their conquest was not an easy one, though it was launched at a time when the armed levies of Shang were engaged against the barbarians far to the east in Shantung. The first five years of the war were touch and go despite the early capture of Anyang and of the Shang heir. The Shang forces, rallying in East China, received support from the non-Chinese peoples of the south and the east and were thus able to maintain their positions while the Chou in Anyang quarreled among themselves. Then in 1022 B.C. the advance was renewed. The Chou king murdered the Shang hostage, executed his own quarreling brothers, and turned east to crush the main Shang forces in Shantung. Here he founded the city of Loyang to control the east of China, an area to which many Shang adherents were deported. This marks the beginning of the Chou ascendancy but not yet its complete victory, for not all the areas loyal to Shang had been conquered, and it was not for another century that revolts against the new dynasty came to an end.

There is no complete account of the establishment of this new dynasty and indeed no connected account of Chou history up to about 600 B.C. We know a good deal about the Later Chou period beginning in 771, for here we have the annals of several of the Chinese states of that period, notably those of Ch'in in the *Han History* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals,* the latter a chronicle of the small state of Lu in Shantung, a history that Confucius himself is supposed to have edited. The annals of Ch'in are rather suspect, and the annals of Lu are terse and obscure and have to be read with the aid of later commentaries, but along with other documentation they provide a great deal of information on the Later Chou period. On the Early Chou (1122–771 B.C.), which may well have been the most important period in the history of China, we have nothing so rich. For we now know that these centuries mark the beginning of the development of the universal imperial Chinese state from the matrix of that net of domains, principalities, territories, and metropolitan districts that was Early Chou China. This is in contrast to the traditional view, based on the work of the Han scribes, that early Chou was a unified empire that degenerated through centuries of anarchic division until again restored by Han. And these centuries also mark the emergence of that inordinate amount of government supervision of life that marks traditional China.

In this early period the Chou kings established their capital at Sian in Shensi, and from that point they attempted to rule a territory that ran from the Manchurian border to the Yangtze River and from the hills of Kansu to the seacoast of Shantung. This was a large, well-populated, but potentially hostile territory, and the numerically inferior Chou aristocrats had to devise a workable system of controls if they were to retain their conquests. They had taken over the Shang system, of course, but that type of federal tribal structure was much too loose and weak. They had to rule not only conquered territories but peripheral areas that had owed some loyalty to Shang and now grudgingly accepted Chou control. Also they were nominal rulers of domains still in the hands of great Shang families, who had preferred to keep their possessions under a conqueror rather than be taken.

The Chou introduced into the federal tribal structure their

own strict patriarchal system, marked by primogeniture and run by a hereditary aristocracy. Where this elite came from is unknown. It has been suggested that in neolithic times fighting groups began to separate themselves from the general farming population and to undertake the job of village defense in return for a share of the crops. It was certainly highly developed within Chou by the time of the conquest, and it was but natural that this group should view the entire Shang territory as their patrimony and that, unable to govern it all directly, they should apportion it among friends, relatives, and allies. These deputies were to govern their grants in peace, to supply labor for the royal cities as needed, to attend the king at stated intervals, to furnish the king food, troops, and accommodations as needed and, in general, to abide by an oath of fidelity to the dynasty. In return for this they had elite status and could govern their grants pretty much as they pleased.

In this manner Chou China started out as a mosaic of large, medium, and petty territories centering around the royal domains. The rulers of these territories were practically autonomous within their own domains but were constrained to loyalty toward Sian by blood and familial relations and by the fact that the armed strength of Chou was ample to enforce the will of Chou.

The ruling elite were graded from the king at Sian through the various titles of the lords, which followed no set precedence of rank but which for Western purposes have been translated as duke, marquis, viscount, baron. The lords held heritable property, which passed on to the eldest son of the family, and each lord was free to make grants of his own land to subordinates. The briefest and easiest way to describe this system would be to call it feudal, for it has great similarities to Western feudalism as well as marked differences.

It is important, beyond academic interest, to label the nature of Chou governance with some precision. As we have already noted, the major Communist revision of Chinese history has made use of "feudal" in a completely pejorative sense, presenting all of Chinese history from the Chou era to mid-nineteenth century as two thousand years of "feudal" stagnation and suffering. If feudalism means anything as a descriptive term, it has to be

applied in relation to medieval Europe where the system we know started, and, like any institution, has to be defined in terms of its structure and its process. Western feudalism had a definite structure, a definite set of values, a definite kind of society, and it headed in a definite direction. For example, it was marked by vassalage, or the voluntary subordination of one aristocrat to another in return for something of value (fief) in which both superior and subordinate held rights.

Certainly the Chou system had fiefs and vassalage of a kind. The king parceled out land to his followers and retainers, and these men could and did further subinfeudate their lands. And the relationship was a voluntary one. But unlike the Western feudal relationship, the Chou connection was not one of homage, an oath of faith as between man and man. Rather it was a bond of fidelity between powerful families as represented by individuals. The binding power was not legal and contractual but personal. Within the imperial or royal lands the lords of domains were members of the royal house. In other domains the lords were members of the Chou clan, whose allegiance to the king tended to vary according to the distance of the fief from Sian. Later, fiefs were ruled by powerful men who were neither of the royal house nor of the Chou clan. Not all Chou states were fiefs in grant. Some were areas still run by Shang nobles who had joined the winning side, and others were run directly by royal administrators or royal military commanders. There is no accurate information on the real size of these Chou domains and fiefs. They are recorded as consisting of many "towns."

Although the land was the nominal possession of the king at Sian, the vassal could dispose of it as he pleased; and though, as in the European system, a Chou landholder could hold one or more fiefs from one or more lords, unlike the Europeans he could also take his fiefs and his loyalties to still another lord. Therefore the ruler who had parceled out his lands to subordinates had no real authority within those lands. He was the grantor of land, the appointer of ranks, and the receiver of tribute, but strangely enough, his own writ did not run apart from the land he immediately ruled himself. In later times lords and vassals could change sides according to their own advantage with no

fear of any stigma whatsoever. The degree of advantage to be attained from shifting allegiance was the only consideration. In the European system men also broke their word, but in China there was no universal church to act as the final adjudicator of men's actions and values, which could spiritually, if not temporally, enforce man's oath to man. Obviously no universal church could arise in a society where each clan was concerned with the cult of its own ancestors. There was, in short, in Chou China no overriding fear of a broken oath being visited with supernatural vengeance, nor was there any real control of the system except sheer power.

What did hold this net of lords and vassals together was neither law nor religion nor even custom, but blood and marriage relationship—the ties of the clan. At the beginning the Chou lords and vassals had indeed been held together by a deep bond of fraternalism, for the great Chou lords could state that they and the king were commonly descended from the same ancestor. Neither law court nor royal hall but the ancestral temple was the center of the Chou aristocracy. Certainly at the start the Chou system of government was not feudalism, but rather the political operation of a great joint family whose head, the Chou, were the recognized religious leaders of the family.

This means that for vassals who were not part of this family, but were of the Shang or else barbarian or non-Chinese, some bond had to be devised to link them with the Chou system. One could not expect outsiders to abide by clan ties. The method that was devised was, according to the Japanese scholar Kaizuka Shigeki, extremely ingenious and simple: a new kind of civilization was created. Kaizuka hypothesizes that immediately after the initial pacification of eastern China the great regent, the Duke of Chou, realizing the enormous problem of ruling a diverse group of Chou, Shang, and barbarian peoples, brought all into association with the Chou clan through the creation of an interlocking series of local cults, each of which centered around a local lord appointed by the Chou king. A clan was a celebratory community united by a common religious festival in honor of an ancestor, and the central family of the clan watched over the ancestral temple. Clans could not participate in the services for

the deity of any other clan. What the Duke of Chou did was to find one deity that all men could serve in addition to their own, and in whose service all would be bound together with Chou. This was the local god of the earth and grain of each community.

The local lord was the chief functionary of the local altar of soil and crops, and as such he represented a union of all the peoples of his domains just as the king at Sian represented a union of all the Chinese. Furthermore, the gods were political appointees in the sense that they had no tenure; their chief priest, the local ruler, could name one of his own ancestors to the position if the crops should be poor or fail. The altars of earth and grain became the guardians of the state.

CHOU SOCIETY

Chou laid the basis for Chinese social organization as well as for governance. Evidence about the great mass of the peasantry is scanty, but probably the Chou conquest left him untouched. He tilled the land for his Chou masters as he had for the Shang, although the village commune owned its land, and the total of communal lands within a given Chou state was tribal property, even if the usufruct was discrete. The Chinese peasant was not always compelled to stay on the local land. He paid in services and taxes, he furnished forced labor, he prospered or at least ate well in good years, and he hungered and suffered in famine years.

Because of the importance of agriculture, there was a close and vigorous supervision of farming life. Each Chou state had its supervisor of agriculture and minister of works. Elaborate farmers' almanacs date from as early as the fifth century B.C., and at least intermittently during the Chou period, serious efforts were made to assign farm land according to the size of a family and the fertility of the soil, with taxes in proportion to the fertility and the yield.

All in all, there is great evidence, and this is constant through all Chinese history, of high respect for agriculture but not much concern for agriculturists. The origin of the sophisticated agriculture of the Eastern Chou is lost in myths that go back to the "divine farmer" of the third millennium B.C., who cleared the

fields and taught the people the sowing of crops. According to tradition, in the years following this date (2737 B.C.) the people were given, by great rulers, weights and measures, calendars, ditching, diking, and soil conservation. None of this can be verified beyond the fact that many practices were of considerable antiquity, and certainly not every story of antiquity is wholly imaginative.

In Shang times there was some system of allocation of land, but in very early times the land was probably in the common possession of the tribes. As Chinese agriculture expanded steadily outward from the original river valleys, stronger tribes would set weaker ones to tilling the soil while they became the aristocratic defenders of the villages and the land. In the beginning it was possible for Chou to continue the practice of an extensive agriculture, something like the strip system of medieval Europe, with land lying fallow; but as the centuries passed, the amount of unused land became scarcer and systems of land-division, of exchange, and of tenancy arose, with the disposal always in the hands of the nobility.

Until the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 B.C.) there was no precise measurement of the land. A "field" was simply a piece of land, and land measure was computed by estimating the number of people an area could feed. Grants of land were determined not by specific measure but according to how many people lived and worked on a given land area. Some grants even disposed entire clans. It was not until late Chou times that measurement by a standard number of paces—a *mou*—was introduced.

We know nothing of the real size of land holdings and harvest yields, or of tax demands and returns, aside from the most general information. The arrangements under which the tenants lived varied from lord to lord, and one assumes that there were good landlords and bad. The medium for permanent reinvestment of the growing wealth of the Chou era was land, and the landlord tended to live in a walled metropolitan center, not in the countryside itself. The farmers worked as tenants. There does not seem to have been general private ownership of land in China by any except the nobility until 216 B.C., when an imperial decree set a tax on declared ownership of land without reser-

vations as to who could own it. This was a confiscatory tax on the nobility who, as a consequence, threw tremendous amounts of land on the market. However, the tenant, unable to pay the price, remained by and large a tenant, and the wealthy and the emergent mercantile class became the owners of the land. Under this system of private title, heavy rents were substituted for the previous heavy taxes.

If the evidence of later Chou times, which admittedly were abnormal times of civil strife, can be generalized, the lot of the Chinese farmer was never very good. Paradoxically enough, China could not have prospered and expanded in the Chou era as it did without good soil management and good farm practices. The expansion of China to the west and south to the Yangtze was based on agricultural foundations, yet the foundations of the farm economy were being continually weakened through exorbitant demands for labor, rent, and taxes. In late Chou times a contemporary record estimates the average return on the average farm homestead as an annual deficit, and earlier, at the end of Western Chou, conditions were so bad that farmers abandoned their fields rather than pay taxes from meager yields in times of famine and danger. In the Eastern Chou period the rulers of states were more than once faced with the problem of preventing farmers from moving on to more productive sites. We also know that in times of famine whole populations were moved to surplus areas.

The farmers did not always take their hard times easily. There are many records of local uprisings, and in the ninth century B.C. a Chou king was temporarily dispossessed of his capital by a disaffected farming population. However, the farmer was not a slave, for the loss of personal freedom is not tolerable within a clan system. There were slaves, generally criminals or prisoners of war, and slavery was a hereditary status, although it was not significant in ancient China. Instead, society was graded. Each individual had his place and, most significantly, his worth was measured by his place, by his role.

In such a system every subordinate, no matter how highly placed, was at the mercy of his superior, for the mere fact of being a superior made a man a worthier person. To offset this, it

was a partially open society, in which men could rise and fall in rank. Able commoners were elevated to high place in Eastern Chou times and entire aristocratic families were degraded.

The aristocrats, who came to be called *chun-tzu* or "sons of rulers," were a class apart from the commons whether or not they were titled. They disdained manual labor, despised trade, took enormous pride in their lineage, and were deeply involved in a complex code of etiquette, the knowledge and practice of which marked the true aristocrat. Hunting and the noble arts of war were their proper occupations; they were greatly conscious of family honor, and blood feuds were common. Indeed, the Chou aristocrat is hard to distinguish in many respects from the feudal noble of early medieval Europe, but in other respects he was a world apart. For one thing, unlike the Westerner, he did not despise learning, and for another, while he lived within a walled city, he did not live within a walled residence or castle. The well-to-do Chou aristocrat lived well and comfortably in his house and pavilion and gardens. Like his European counterpart he was fond of the cup, the banquet, the poet, and minstrel. Unlike the European he liked to bathe.

The town in which he lived was apt to be quite large in area because the metropolitan towns were military and administrative centers. It has been estimated that Loyang's outer walls enclosed an area greater than that of modern Peking. The ruler of the town ruled the surrounding land, and the habit of private feuds made it difficult for his superiors to take punitive action against him if he was a member of a powerful family, for his family would take private vengeance against the officials. Therefore, when such punishment had to be levied against an individual, the whole clan would be destroyed as a precautionary measure. This tended to make every member of a powerful clan a hostage for every other member as against the government.

Aside from the farmers, the officials who governed them, and the aristocrats who ruled them, there were the artisans and the merchants, who had begun to separate out as distinct economic classes prior to the sixth century B.C., although great and wealthy merchants do not seem to appear until the Spring and Autumn

period. The merchants and artisans were, by and large, town dwellers operating in the metropolitan market places.

A medium of exchange was early in operation in the form of strings of shells (the shells often of bronze), and copper had great value in various coin forms. The great mediums of exchange all through the Chou period were coins, grains, and bronze. Gold was used as a measure of value as early as the second century B.C. The rich merchant was, more often than not, rich not from mercantile transactions but from usurious moneylending.

Because of the nature of the tax system the money supply often rested in the hands of the lenders and not of the state, for the greater part of both taxes and rents were paid in kind, and both government and landlord tended to be goods rich and money poor. But wealth was no measure of worth, and the status of merchants remained lowly, certainly below that of the administrators and warriors who, operating from the walled towns in a fairly uniform setup during the Western Chou period, were the heads of the bureaus of war, works, finance, and criminal police of the states. It is interesting to note that these four known bureaucracies, common in Western Chou, were all agencies regulatory of daily activities.

The professional warriors were not aristocrats, because they held no fiefs. While the lords and nobles were skilled and trained in the use of arms, these men were the professional practitioners of war. They directed operations in the field, laid sieges, and defended cities, and in the late Chou period in the era traditionally known as the period of Warring States, these men from the really big states of that time were directing armies of one hundred thousand men in the field. Long prior to those last centuries of the Chou dynasty, war as an instrument of politics was one of the major agencies in welding a single state from the diversity of Chou territories. There are no Chinese epics or sagas in the Western sense, but much Chinese poetry depicts valor at arms.

[7]

The Consolidation of China

The unification of China took place over more than five hundred years, from the eighth century B.C. to 226 B.C. It begins with the year the Chou court fled to Loyang after the murder of the emperor, and ends with the year that one single universal rule was placed in effect over all of China. At the beginning of the period there were twenty-five major states or domains and many smaller ones, and they can be divided, roughly, into the Chinese states of the Yellow River basin and the partly Chinese states of the Yangtze River basin. From time to time, one or another state or combination of states would dominate China. The age was one of slow consolidation of power, of a progression toward unity and the building of the empire, half a millennium in which, while the principle of elite rule is maintained, the elite very slowly shifts from a hereditary nobility to one dominated by educated bureaucrats. It was a period marked by war and violence, which horrified the good men and philosophers of the time. Since it is the animadversions of the philosophers of the sixth to fourth centuries that have survived more than any direct knowledge of the actual political process, we view the age traditionally through the reflections of morally outraged men. Unless we are careful, we fail to see what was really going on—the building up

of a great new state and tradition and not simply a tearing down.

One great feature of the epoch is the growth of a genuine administrative class. This came about slowly but logically. As some states grew larger and more powerful, the need for competent administration outran the abilities of the hereditary ruler. In the smaller states the desperate need for survival often meant bringing in some shrewd, clever professional diplomatist or minister-adviser. This was not uniformly true. In some states the hereditary ruler firmly held the reins of policy and administration, in others he determined policy and left its execution in the hands of capable hired men, and in a very few states both policy and administration were given over to men appointed for their ability. As a general rule, after the seventh century, ministers begin to replace diviners as the chief counselors of rulers. But these new men were not always aristocrats, and they had no set of common traditions, no traditional status, no sanctions of their own. They therefore created rules and laws.

The Spring and Autumn period (772–481 B.C.) begins the development of a rule of law in China. The first code of law is presumably that of 536 B.C., cast in bronze by the state of Cheng. One of the great authorities on this period says he does not know of a single instance in early Chou of a specific crime calling for a specific punishment. There were simply no written codes. Criminal offenses were criminal because someone in power chose to treat them as such. Matters of public law were handled within the clan or the family, and administrative law was simply a matter of the whim of each ruler. There were, of course, customary guides to conduct and statements of principle, but law, as generally understood, did not exist. Even civil litigation was possible only between equals; if there was a difference in rank between litigants, then the superior was right as a matter of course. The rise of a rule of law was a notable thing in a civilization that had for a very long time done without one.

The impetus toward the new system of administration and law seems to have been given by the state of Ch'i, which, for convenience sake, divided itself into territorial units. Each unit reported directly to the ruler, and his orders in turn were passed down a chain of command in each territorial subdivision. Then,

to enrich the state, Ch'i monopolized the sale of salt and iron and began the state regulation of trade. To a greater or lesser degree, other states began to emulate this efficient way of doing things and to make use of learned men, a practice that already had a long tradition in China. Such men were of particular value to rulers who had usurped their power. Usurpers could survive only through their ability to administer what they had seized, and were in need of good professional civil and military advisers. Gradually the old religious, cultural, and family bonds, which had once been the cement of the political hodgepodge of Western Chou, gave way to considerations of sheer power and security. The power of a state now depended upon certain internal factors such as the ability of its administration, the number of walled cities it could construct, and the amount of food it could produce; and on certain external factors such as favorable alliances, no matter with whom, for in the centuries after the fall of Loyang, Chinese states unhesitatingly turned to alliances with barbarians—the non-Chinese of the southern, western, and northern marches. In state after state a new class of men, nominally subordinate to the rulers, was performing the real functions of state. Occasionally one of these ministers would become a true leader, but by and large they remained in the background, if not always voluntarily.

The year 632 B.C. seems to mark the beginning of large-scale war. Up to 591 B.C., in order to ensure a common defense for what was then China against barbarians, the more powerful states established a league wherein the title of *pa*, or lord protector, passed to the temporarily most powerful ruler in the league. The title of *wang*, or king, was still vested in the Chou ruler, whose real power was now limited to quite a small area around Loyang in East China. His actual duties were exercised by the lord protector until 591 B.C., when the idea of a Chou confederacy broke down. After this the struggle for power accelerated, and by the opening of the fourth century a state of constant strife had set in among the surviving ten major states, which tended to form into two large leagues led by, respectively, Ch'in and Ch'u. Each of these states was so efficient in war that seemingly the only way to avoid war was for one of them to triumph and set up a single rule.

Up to this latter period the nominal overlordship of the Chou king at Loyang was carefully observed—that is, in the religious and traditional sense, for although he was among the most inconsiderable of powers he was still the king and, more importantly, the *t'ien-tzu* or Son of Heaven. This view of the king was, however, that of a member of the hereditary nobility, a class that became seriously weakened during this period and in some places was even replaced by the new men, who had no ties with class or custom. Each of these men, lacking any checks to their power, moved to aggrandize as much power as possible.

This led to the assumption of royal titles as well as power, and the rulers of great states began to call themselves *wang*, starting around 370 B.C. when the ruler of Wei first usurped the title. If each great contender for power in China could call himself king, then there was no further need to use the moribund ruler of Loyang as a figurehead, nor was there any point in maintaining, after the fourth century, the fiction of a Chinese confederation run by a lord protector who paid court to the Chou king. Now it was each state for itself. This is no more evident than in the bitterness and brutality with which the interstate wars were fought and also in the demarcation of state frontiers by great defensible walls. Under the circumstances, a new title much more significant than king had to be found for aspirants to dominion over all China, and it was found in the title "*Ti*," the most powerful deity of Shang and the title of the supreme rulers of the legendary past. Henceforth *Ti* became the appellation of the great rulers of the period of Warring States, and it carried the force of "emperor," a title that would be finally made real in the third century.

After about 632 B.C., two centuries of conflict saw central China, composed of smaller and weaker states, become the battleground for the large powerful states of the periphery. The chivalric code of war that had previously marked the Chou gentleman went by the board. Covenants between states were broken as easily as they were made and with no regard for the terrible oaths sworn at the making of the pact. No power existed that could force or oblige the strongest states to keep their word, and since no small state could survive if it acted ethically, no

one kept his word. The interstate rivalry was matched by an intrastate rivalry with a corresponding breakdown of conduct. Within the state, men struggling to usurp power used the most murderous means, ranging from blatant public assassination to secret murder. Those who dared remonstrate were tortured, executed, or, if fortunate, exiled. The chief instruments of power in the hands of rulers and their ministers were the bribe and the hired bravo, both of which were used swiftly and indiscriminately. It became customary for any official given some grant of authority to view it as merely a springboard for the seizure, by any means, of still more authority. Women, noble or common, were simply appropriated by powerful men.

So great was the oppression that some actually divested themselves of their holdings in order to avoid catastrophe. The poison of ambition was also in the new administrators, who began to advise their masters on how to increase their power and domain. The high counselors of the large states began to think seriously of the prospects of the rule of all China by a single state—theirs, of course. Analogies between civilizations are often misleading, but the state reached in this age of contention and war is well described in the following passage:

> Words changed their ordinary meanings and were construed in a new sense. Reckless daring passed for the courage of a loyal partisan, farsighted hesitation was the excuse of a coward, moderation was the pretext of the unmanly, the power to see all sides of a question was the complete inability to act. . . . To succeed in a plot was shrewd, it was still more clever to divine one. . . . An agreement sworn to by either party, when they could do nothing else, was binding as long as both were powerless, but the first side to pluck up courage, when they saw an opening and an undefended point, took more pleasure in revenge on a confiding enemy than if they had achieved it by an open attack.*

So wrote Thucydides on the civil war in Hellenic Greece.

While struggle characterized the upper class of this period, the common people existed to support their ambitions. They were liable to exactions, taxes, corvée, confiscation, and the bloody

* Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, R. Livingstone, trans. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 189–190.

whims of the local law. In peace they could barely live; in war they were often reduced to cannibalism. It is true, as was said earlier, that we view this age through the eyes of men who hated it and who no doubt exaggerated its faults, but if only a part of the annals on the period of Warring States is correct, then China, in achieving the universal imperial state that lay at the end of that period, passed through one of the world's great Times of Troubles between the sixth and third centuries B.C.

That contemporary scholars should, for the most part, have detested their times is easily enough understood. The nature of the age and the multiplicity of aristocracy and nobility in late Chou times created an unemployed upper class. There were simply not enough posts, sinecures, estates, and offices to go around, even if those who held them had determined on fair shares. Therefore a considerable segment of this class, living in poverty and excluded from their old perquisites by jumped up commoners and luckier aristocrats, would in all likelihood view the situation sourly. Some became hired bravos, some minor clerks, and others scholars of sorts or wandering tutors. What they had in common was a complete dislike for a system that had no place for its former rulers. Confucius was one such man, with this difference—that he was a man so altruistic and discerning as to make his cause that of the people and vice versa.

This aristocracy, dispossessed by force of circumstances, had by virtue of education the ability to write, read, and do numbers, some skills in the arts of war, and a considerable training in the customs and protocol of their class. Some of them had held good posts but had lost them to conquest or a change of rulers. They became traditionalists and were now the self-appointed custodians of Chinese culture. That they were men of education was fortunate for China, because many of them turned to teaching in order to support themselves. In this way began not only a diffusion of learning but the New Jerusalem of the Chinese philosophers. Their teaching was not altruistic, except for men like Confucius. They had to make a living and the best way to do it was to teach young men how to be successful. Like the pupils of the Greek Sophists, those of the Schoolmasters of the Eastern era were ambitious, for, said Chuang-tzu, the Taoist philosopher, "The gentleman gives himself to the pursuit of fame."

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The Great Age of Philosophy and Science

MASTER K'UNG

K'ung Ch'iu (K'ung Fu-tzu—Confucius), the younger of two brothers, was born in Lu in 522 B.C. The earliest and best account of his life is by the Han historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien, writing in the first century A.D. This means there was a gap of more than four centuries before his life was recorded. Nevertheless Ssu-ma (who was not a Confucian and who may have been taking a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward Confucian teachings) obviously had access to more sources for the life of K'ung than we have, including oral traditions and written records in Lu. Our sole good source now is the *Analects,* a sparse and unorganized transcript of K'ung's conversations with various people, mostly his students. The information in this is far from adequate and the book itself was probably not compiled until some time after his death. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* of his home state of Lu, along with the commentaries on them, add some minor bits of information. His disciples, the potentially most fruitful source, were silent. They seem to have known little or cared less about the life of their teacher.

According to tradition, K'ung's father had an excellent record as a military official, but young K'ung had to make his own way. His family enjoyed no more than the shabby-genteel poverty of the displaced petty nobility of that age. Probably largely self-educated, he began in adolescence, in a traditional school, the formal education for one of his descent. He committed the *Odes* and the *Book of History* to heart, and he learned the minute observance of those good forms of conduct connected with the life of the gentleman born—a type of observance that seemed to vex him, for he had a contempt for the depreciated standards of the gentleman of his own day.

At the age of thirty the student became a teacher. Like many other young men whose birth and worth barred them from manual labor, he made his living by instructing young men on the criteria of success. But what distinguished Master K'ung from the thousand other itinerant tutors of his time was that he had singularly different ideas, not only on what constituted the gentleman but on what constituted success. Furthermore, he took as a pupil any bright young man ("In education there are no class distinctions"), regardless of birth or class, and required of him only enough payment for the master to subsist on. He must have been a considerable teacher, despite the fact that he guaranteed his pupils nothing, because so many of his students were sought as administrators and officials of one kind and another. Certainly he believed in himself: "If some ruler would employ me, in a month I should have my system working. In three years everything would be running smoothly."*

He died, in 479 B.C., a loved but not an honored man. Indeed, he was something of a failure, because this teacher who could make excellent civil servants of other men was not wanted himself in that capacity by any state. Nor was he memoralized, after a long lifetime of educating men, in anything other than that short and unsystematic register of laconic statement—the *Analects*. Since he was a practical failure and since it is now agreed that he neither wrote the *Annals of Lu* nor edited the Classics, then in what did his greatness consist?

* J. Ware, *The Sayings of Confucius* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 89.

In a superstitious age he forced men's attention to the problems of this world—to the real problems of human society—taught them how to define these problems, and gave them a reasonable solution, i.e., a moral order of society. This is his hallmark—a reasonableness in the conduct of human affairs. The matters with which he was passionately concerned do not lie in the ordinary domain of philosophers, for they are neither metaphysical nor scientific. They are the day-to-day matters of social justice, the orderly administration of public affairs and decent human conduct. He thought (or to be more precise, we think he thought) that government ought to be operated in behalf of the general welfare. This is not to say that he thought everyone ought to participate; rather, that those superior men who bore the weight of responsibility of rule must exercise that responsibility in the best interests of all men. He suggested that this could come about if every man knew his exact relationship to every other man. In the right kind of society everyone had his place. Every man served the one above him and the one above protected the inferior. This was a Heaven-conferred relationship and not something that Confucius claimed to have discovered. Indeed he disclaimed originality. "I am a transmitter, not an originator. I believe in and love the ancient things." But he did believe that his teachings were the truth. "If Heaven had wished to let the cause of truth perish then I, a future mortal, should not have got such a relation to that cause . . ."* His truth lay in a harmonious linkage of relationships, which he felt must not collapse as it was doing so terribly in his own lifetime. The bond that kept society all of a right piece was convention, by which was meant the entire spectrum of obligations imposed by morality, tradition, and courtesy. Everyone in the good society should know what these obligations were, because everyone knew his relationship to all others, and he knew the latter because he knew how to call people by their right names.

Confucius realized that men were often misled by labels. Therefore he counseled that men should be called by what they

* J. Legge, *The Analects,* in *The Chinese Classics,* 2nd ed. rev. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), p. 218.

are. "Let the prince be the prince, the subject subject, the father father and the son son." Calling men by their right status was the first step in a litany of social order. One's status accords with one's name; one's rights and duties accord with one's status; one's conduct accords with one's rights and duties; and all society accords with the conduct of its members. The knowledge of what everyone really is yields correct social relationships and hence correct government. Obviously in a society so ordered, only the highest in achievement are in charge of affairs, with the exception of hereditary rulers. Confucius wished that such rulers be the best of men. If they were not, he advised that they place the conduct of their affairs in the hands of men of the highest professional and personal caliber.

In the eighth chapter of the *Analects* he establishes rules for the superior man:

> The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell. The superior man loves his soul; the inferior man loves his property. The superior man always remembers how he was punished for his mistakes; the inferior man always remembers what presents he got. The superior man is always liberal toward other's opinions, but does not completely agree with them; the inferior man completely agrees with other's opinions, but is not liberal toward them. The superior man blames himself. The inferior man blames others.*

These aphorisms continue for the entire chapter, but probably the most meaningful one, as far as the future administration of China is concerned, states: "The superior man goes through life without any one preconceived course of action or any taboo, he merely decides for the moment what is the right thing to do." Here is the great rationale for the dispensing of justice and administration by superior men.

Confucius was too deeply attached to tradition to seek an end to princes. However, he advises that only the most capable and most virtuous men be hired by rulers, and he defines capability and virtue in terms of inherent capacity refined by educa-

* Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 833.

tion. Herein Confucius acknowledges the difference among men—their natural capacities. Men at the outset do not differ in virtue or morality, he said, because these are matters that can be inculcated, given the capacity. They do differ radically in their congenital capacities, just as mountains differ in size, diamonds in brilliance, and rivers in depth. The true gentleman, the noble man, is that man of natural capacities who has achieved virtue through the proper education, who has been consequently made aware of his responsibilities to the society around him, and who practices those standards of conduct representative of true righteousness.

It is not remarkable that Confucius, the teacher, should yield the highest place to the educated man, or that the son of impoverished gentry should believe axiomatically in social classes and hereditary rulers, or that this observer of a decaying order, whose life was spent in a crucible of private wars, should prize peace and order. What is remarkable is that this same man should insist that men of ability can be trained to virtue; that other men will emulate the example of those in high places; that neither birth, blood, nor ascription but ability, conduct, and achievement should determine a man's role in society; that government, while it ought to be in the hands of the best, should be for the sake of the governed; and that the best are produced by training to discriminate a rational education in values, which is a view of the role of education akin to that of Cicero and Isocrates.

This concern with the relations of men with men, as we shall see, is the primary concern of the Chinese thinkers of this age. It is a concern with action now, in this world, with man's self-knowledge and the possibility of his achieving it, with the canons of proper behavior, and with the integrity of the individual. Although his preoccupation with the nature of society presupposes an interest in human nature, Confucius gives us little to go on here. He seems convinced that all men are capable of becoming moral beings, because, despite their variant capacities, all men are "born to righteousness." He was a great believer in decency, honor, good breeding, and *noblesse oblige.* He himself, a truly good and human-hearted man, prefers to dwell on men's possibilities, not on their original natures. It lay with his two greatest disciples to consider that aspect of men more closely.

MOISM

Mo-tzu, the founder of Moism, was probably a contemporary of Confucius, but little is known about his life and even the dates of his birth and death are obscure. His teachings in the book of *Mo Tzu* stand sharply apart from the various Confucian schools. He was a bitter enemy of the aristocrats and of the ostentations and many impracticalities so dear to the Confucian heart, as well as an opponent of the ceremonials and rites that the Confucianists confidently believed to be the outward and visible sign of that morality that held society together. These fripperies Mo-tzu considered of no use; he was a utilitarian through and through. For their part, the Confucians deemed him to be a vulgar man with little learning and less humor.

Mo-tzu's demand for logic was directed toward his own views of man, society, and government, and arose from a thorough detestation of his times and especially of war, with whose senseless waste and destruction his age was filled.

> But when we consider victory as such, there is nothing useful about it. When we consider the possessions obtained through it, it does not even make up for the loss . . . Now to pursue the people to death and aggravate the danger feared by both superiors and subordinates in order to obtain an empty city—this is to give up what is needed and to treasure what is already in abundance. Such an undertaking is not in accordance with the interests of the country.*

His hatred of what the rulers of his day were doing and his efforts to establish a theory of peace and order led him to advocate universal love. Since the fundamental principle of utility was the greatest good for the greatest number, what could be more beneficial and useful than that love that leads to the end of war? To support his argument he drew on antiquity, a source that had the greatest possible prestige in the Chinese world, especially as no one knew anything about it.

> In the beginning there was no ruler and everyone was independent. Since everyone was independent, there would be one purpose

* Y. P. Mei, *Motse: The Neglected Rival of Confucius* (London: Probsthain, 1934), p. 75.

> when there was one man, ten purposes when there were ten men, a hundred purposes when there were a hundred men . . . and so on until the number of men became innumerable and the number of different purposes became innumerable with it. And all of them approved their own ideas and disapproved those of others. And there was strife among the strong and struggle among the weak.*

Furthermore, he wanted to unite mankind by superseding the most divisive force in the Chinese state system—the family tie and the bickerings of clans—and imposing a single righteous will. Mo-tzu believed that men, ultimately recognizing their own best interests, would select from among themselves their most virtuous man for ruler. "Exaltation of the worthy is the foundation of government." He, in turn, would select virtuous men for his officials and advisers, and there would be thus created a political organization in which the most able were at the head of government. Since men would realize the value of making their own standards and conduct conform to those of the ruler, then the mandate of the ruler of the state would be absolute, subordinate only to Heaven, which is conceived of as "universal love." Ironically, Moism, which advocates peace, order, and prosperity through the submission of all to the single will of the state, is in effect totalitarian. If one believed as did Mo-tzu that man descended from a state of nature that we can describe as Hobbesian, then superficially there seemed to be no other solution.

Moism did not survive as a single school past the first century B.C., primarily because it was unreasonable and the Chinese have never been tolerant of the irrational in human affairs. As the *Chuang-tzu* said of Mo-tzu:

> Any teaching that would have men toil through life and be contented with a bare funeral at death, is too austere. It makes men sorrowful and dejected. Its practice would be difficult. I fear it cannot be regarded as the Tao of the sages. It is contrary to human nature and few people can stand it.†

* Lin Yutang, *op. cit.*, p. 791.

† Y. P. Mei, *Tsing Hua Monthly* (February 1964), pp. 199–200.

Though Mo-tzu himself was able to carry it out, what about the rest of mankind? The disasters of a real total system, the Ch'in dynasty, helped it into oblivion.

The years after Confucius' death were marked by a significant increase in the scale of conflict. The smaller states were clearly headed for extinction, and dramatic events showed that even large states could be destroyed if they had careless or incompetent rulers and ministers. By this time China was composed of only about twelve significant states. The organization of each was much more effective than those of the Spring and Autumn period, and with much larger populations and areas, their resources to raise, support, and sustain armies and military campaigns increased accordingly. This increase can be graphically seen in the size of armies and the number of casualties. In the early Spring and Autumn period, armies had numbered between two and five thousand. By the end of the period they numbered as high as fifty thousand, and by the middle of the fourth century B.C. some states could raise armies numbering sixty thousand. In a disastrous defeat by Ch'in, the armies of Han and Chao sustained more than eighty thousand casualties.

In 376 B.C. the three families of Ch'in formally abolished the Ch'in state and created entirely distinct kingdoms, a move made without attention to the old feudal rights of the Chou king. In 374, the state of Han absorbed Cheng, one of the remaining smaller central states. These events occurred within the lifetime of Mo-tzu and just before the birth of Mencius in 372 B.C., which in part accounts for the differences between the two in approach and attitude. That the older restraints, still visible in Confucius' day, had disappeared was dramatically demonstrated when the ruler of Wei took the title of wang, which heretofore had been reserved for the Chou rulers. In such an age the Moist argument of utility was a powerful inducement, and Mencius, in attempting to uphold Confucian values, found himself having to combat it. Rulers expected, and indeed demanded, that those who advised them be able to strengthen the state and enrich the country. All wanted to attain the great prestige achieved by the rulers of antiquity about whom scholars talked. But the examples of the Chou kings were so weak and their policies so obviously

inept, that even the title of wang was empty and lacking in dignity, and they began to search for new models and new titles.

MASTER MENG

Master Meng (Meng-tzu, ca. 372–279 B.C.), known to us as Mencius, was the greatest disciple of Confucius although more than a century separated their lives. In the intervening period the teachings of Confucius had failed to grasp the Chinese mind and had remained only one of many competing systems. The reputation of Mencius is an award of posterity, for his place in the canon of classical works and his views on human nature did not become accepted as truly Confucian until the eleventh century. Like Confucius, Mencius was a wandering teacher and a failure as men measured such things. His teachings were recorded by his students in the *Book of Mencius.*

To Mencius man is inherently good ("Human nature is disposed toward goodness, just as water tends to flow downward,"*) and man is inherently compassionate ("All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others"†). This is a kind of sweet optimism that takes the position that if people are wicked it is not to be imputed to their natures. Rather it is to be blamed on the failure of their education and on those social forces that prevent them from most usefully developing their innate abilities and talents. He agrees with Confucius that the ruler of a state must be able and virtuous, and this is the only kind of ruler he wants. Anyone less favored is to be replaced by his ministers. Government must be for the benefit of the governed, true, but this is to be determined by the governed themselves. "The people are the most important element in a nation. . . ."‡ Here he parts with his master, for Confucius, who had a good deal of respect for constituted authority, offered no recourse from bad rulers except the alleviation of good ministers. Confucius does not tell us how to cope with tyrants. Mencius, who believed that "Heaven hears as the people hear. Heaven sees as the people see,"§ comes

* J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius,* in *The Chinese Classics,* 2nd. ed. rev. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), p. 396 (modified).

† *Ibid.,* p. 402 (modified).

‡ *Ibid.,* p. 483.

§ *Ibid.,* p. 357.

right to the point and sanctions popular rebellions. He had a suspicion of authority anyway. Whereas Confucius believes the sensible man will conform with things when they seem harmless and will refrain from them when they seem harmful, exerting himself only to persuade others to avoid such moral stain, Master Meng advises the sensible to revolt. Sanctioned as the Mandate of Heaven, this is the escape valve later Confucianism offers to the society it envisions. The right of rebellion may seem a paradox when taken in conjunction with the fact that these men always supported the established order, but in Confucian semantics a revolt can be an established order, that is, both the uprising and the status quo have the same source—the Will of Heaven. How does one know at any given time whether the revolt or the order has this Mandate? The answer is simple—which succeeds? This balance of tensions was to be of the greatest value to the Confucian scholar-officials, because it always permitted them to be with the winning side.

Despite his advocacy of popular revolt, Mencius could be authoritarian. When Confucius, who had great faith in men, had wanted them to stand on their own feet and do their own searching for the truth, Mencius wanted men to establish themselves in ancient authority. Of all the philosophers he is the most detailed in setting forth the ancient ways of life and rule, ways that had become corrupted in his time. Mencius is also concerned with social justice, but just as convinced as his master that the properly educated man ranks the highest in society. He believed, as one authority points out, true social justice would be done if Mencius were emperor.

MASTER HUNG

Although Mencius and Hsün-tzu (Hsün Ch'ing, ca. 320–ca. 235 B.C.) are separated by only half a century, it was a time of social and political change even more dramatic than between Confucius and Mencius. It was a period of innovation and of great accumulations of both power and wealth. The scale and scope of warfare had greatly increased. In 293 B.C., the Ch'in general Po Ch'i, in a policy of cruelty calculated to inspire terror throughout the world, had the entire defeated army of Wei and Han executed,

some 240,000 men, more deaths than the United States sustained in World War II. By 260, when Hsün-tzu had reached his maturity, the scale had reached apocalyptic proportions, even allowing for exaggeration by historians. In the most impressive victory of the Warring State period, the general Po Ch'i defeated the army of Chao and executed all 450,000 men after they had surrendered. The instability of human life and of personal successes was underscored in the fate of virtually every important man of the age. Po Ch'i, through his victories, had brought Ch'in to the verge of conquering the world. His reputation was made, his successes were legendary, his wealth was that of a king. Yet when he refused to lead a campaign that he believed would bring disaster, he was summarily executed. The truth of the Taoist proverb that the moment of victory is also the beginning of disaster was clear for all to see. A man of character, of humaneness, of convictions, could not survive in such a world. Similarly, the Chou, which even in the time of Mencius had preserved some vestiges of former glory, were ingloriously swept away in 256 by Ch'in, which entered the royal domain, deposed the last king, discontinued the sacrifices to his ancestors, and reduced his descendants to the level of common men.

This was the age of Hsün-tzu, the "molder of ancient Confucianism," a great philosopher by any standards, and one of the world's great and original minds. He was the only one of the pre-Han Confucianists who organized and wrote his own materials, which provide a primary source of his thought. What little we know of the man himself dates only from his later life, when he became a magistrate of Lanling. It was Hsün-tzu who created the canonical authority of the Classics. Yet at the same time he had little patience with the idealization of a past too obscure to study. "The beginning of Heaven and Earth—it is today." He was a highly practical man, giving short shrift to sentimentality, superstition, and elaborate ceremonial, and it was his view of human nature that prevailed as the orthodox Confucian view until Mencius was rehabilitated in the Sung dynasty. Just as Mencius knew that man was inherently good, so did Hsün-tzu know that man was inherently bad.

> Man's nature is evil; goodness is the result of conscious activity. The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost. Hence, any man who follows his nature and indulges his emotions will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society, and will end as a criminal. Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will he be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.*

On the other hand Hsün-tzu also believed in man's unlimited capacity for improvement under the aegis of education. Whereas Mencius thought of education as man's original good nature working itself out for the benefit of society, so Hsün-tzu thought of education as society working itself out on man's nature.

> Original nature is that which I cannot produce, yet which can be developed. Self-cultivation is that which I do not originally have, but which can be produced. Acceptances and rejections and habitual practice are the means of developing original nature. To concentrate on one thing and not vary is that whereby self-cultivation is perfected. Practice alters a person's inclinations; if kept up for a long time it alters his inmost being. If a person concentrates on one thing and does not vary, he will become as wise as the gods and form a triad with Heaven and Earth . . . if the man on the street cultivates goodness and wholly completes its cultivation, he will be called a Sage . . . For the Sage is the man who has cultivated himself.†

* B. Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), p. 157.

† H. H. Dubs, *Hsuntzu: The Moulder of Ancient Confucianism* (London: Probsthian, 1927), pp. 185–186.

As he differed sharply with Mencius on human nature, so he differed with Confucius (whom he considered to be the only other true Confucian) on the nature of education. Confucius is willing to let men study as they will and come to their own understanding, Hsün-tzu does not trust men to think for themselves and wants them to study only under qualified teachers, working from a set body of authorized knowledge, so as to supersede their inherent natures. Like a good Confucian, Hsün-tzu also wants this education to include the proper training in conduct.

His rational and comprehensive views of man's fulfillment within society and his sour view of human nature dominated orthodox Confucianism for over a millennium. He has been termed authoritarian, and so he was, but only insofar as he appealed to an authority and especially to the Classics, which he believed provided the basis of learning. (Confucius and Mencius also talk of the Classics—Confucius only touched on them, while Mencius doubted sections of the *Book of History.*) Hsün-tzu's superior man is the learned man, rooted in the orthodox repositories of wisdom, comprehension of which has disciplined his passions; this is the man who should govern. The later scholar-official who looked for truth in the sages is his legacy.

TAOISM

Unlike Confucianism, which was concerned with the individual only as a means to ordering society, Taoism is concerned with the individual and the universe. Its teaching, though completely counter to Confucianism, influenced it and became an ineradicable part of the Chinese mind. Its greatest texts, the *Lao-tzu* and the *Chuang-tzu*, are anthologies that cannot be attributed, and it is doubtful whether there ever was a Lao-tzu, although Chuang-tzu was probably contemporary with Mencius. The *Lao-tzu* or *Tao-te Ching*, despite the fact that it has been translated scores of times, is basically impossible to translate because of the terse ambiguity of the original, while the great *Chuang-tzu*, one of the most enjoyable books ever written, leaves one with a sense of indescribable relativism.

Taoism encompasses not only philosophy but alchemy, sorcery, divination, and magic. Indeed, it is a protean vehicle for

the most diverse kinds of knowledge, including that which the other schools, in their rigid focus on men and politics, excluded or ignored. Although it takes a position on man and the state, its preoccupation is with nature. It holds that man and his artificially created society are continually at the mercy of nature; therefore the truly wise man will endeavor first to understand cause and process in the phenomenal universe. The questions Taoism poses are major ones:

> Does the sky turn around? Does the Earth stand still? Do sun and moon compete for their positions? Who causes this? Who directs this? Who has leisure enough to see that such movements continue? Is there perhaps a mechanical arrangement that makes these bodies move inevitably as they do? Is it perhaps that they keep revolving without being able to stop themselves? Is it the clouds which make the rain? Or is it the rain which makes the clouds? Who makes it descend? Who has leisure enough to see that such a result is achieved?*

While the Confucianists, Moists, and the later Legalists, made anxious by their unstable times, were obsessed by the need for order, for fixing things in place, the Taoists were obsessed with change, and with the relativity of things.

The Taoists believed that men originally lived in peace and harmony with each other, for they were then in accord with Tao, the way of nature. They had no need for government or for organized society.

> The true men of old did not know what it was to love life or to hate death. They did not rejoice in birth, nor strive to put off dissolution. Unconcerned they came and unconcerned they went. That was all. They did not forget whence it was they had sprung, neither did they seek to inquire their return thither. Cheerfully they accepted life, waiting patiently for their restoration (the end).†

Men began to talk of virtue, which meant that evil was now abroad, for in the Taoist state of nature there was neither virtue nor vice.

* Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* D. Bodde, trans. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), Vol. I, p. 222.

† Lin Yutang, *op. cit.,* p. 657.

> It is only when people generally consider beauty to be beautiful that the idea of ugliness occurs and only when they recognize goodness to be good that the idea of wickedness comes about . . . For existence and nonexistence give birth to one another . . .*

Organized government and organized society bring artificial standards, among them benevolence and virtue. Desire is created and hence evil. To avoid evil, avoid civilization and its discontents.

> Banish wisdom, discard knowledge, and gangsters will stop. Fling away jade and destroy pearls and petty thieves will cease. Burn tallies and break signets, and the people will revert to their uncouth integrity. Split measures and smash scales and the people will not fight over quantities. Trample down all the institutions of Sages, and the people will begin to be fit for discussing (Tao).†

And avoid particularly the false distinctions between right and wrong, so beloved of the pedants.

> Suppose I am arguing with you, and you get the better of me. Does the fact that I am not a match for you mean that you are really right and I am really wrong? Or if I get the better of you, does the fact that you are not a match for me mean that I am really right and you are really wrong? Must one of us be necessarily right and the other wrong, or may we not both be right or both be wrong? But even if you and I cannot come to an understanding, someone else will surely be a candle to our darkness? Whom then shall we call in as arbitrator in our disputes? If it is someone who agrees with you, the fact that he agrees with you makes him useless as an arbitrator. If it is someone who agrees with me, the fact that he agrees with me makes him useless as an arbitrator. If it is someone who agrees with neither of us, the fact that he agrees with neither of us makes him useless as an arbitrator. If it is someone who agrees with both of us, the fact that he agrees with both of us makes him useless as an arbitrator. So then I and you and he can never reach an understanding. Are we then to go on piling arbitrator upon arbitrator in the hope that someone will eventually settle the matter?‡

* H. H. Dubs, "Taoism," in H. F. McNair, ed., *China* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1946), p. 10.

† Lin Yutang, *op. cit.*, p. 673.

‡ A. Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 10.

The Taoists are, then, against the organized state, organized learning, class differences, the acquisitive society. Rather men should set themselves in harmony with the Tao, the nature of the universe, through complete acceptance of the universal law, termed *wu wei*, which is non-assertive action or a spontaneity in accord with nature. The superior man of the Taoists avoids active participation in affairs. There is no value in these things nor in arguments, and indeed, as we have seen, Taoism challenges the reality of appearances. Small wonder that the Confucianist considered the Taoists to be "irresponsible hermits," and that the Taoists considered the Confucians to be sententious moralists. Yet the influence of Taoism on Confucianism was enormous. For one thing, the great reinterpretation of Confucianism in the later Sung dynasty owed much to Taoism, while the doctrine of *wu wei* became incorporated into the Confucian canon, for there is in orthodox Confucianism a striving for harmony with the natural world, an understanding that man is a partner with nature. This harmony, the attainment of the correct hierarchal relationship between all things, was to be achieved only through Confucian means, however; the emperors were to continue the harmony between man and nature by ritual observances, sacrifices, and ceremonies.

On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for the ordinary man to be guided in daily life by Taoism. A teaching that rejects the organized state is no solution to real needs. Yet though Taoism runs counter to orthodox Confucianism, it has, as one authority states, "appealed permanently to something deep in the Chinese heart." In its reaction against the meticulous regulation of life in the Confucian state, in its reasoned, witty, and sometimes satiric volleys against the pedantry and self-arrogated virtue of many Confucianists, in its frank appeal to the beauty, mystery, and grace of nature, in its trust of the intuitive, instinctive, and spiritual, it endeared itself for all time to the Chinese people and became the vehicle for the myriad cults, folk religions, and superstitions whereby the Chinese could link themselves to the "evidence of things not seen." Considering that the two great influences on the Chinese mind have been these opposites, Taoism and Confucianism, their polarity is perhaps more apparent than real. They may well be reciprocals that have provided the Chi-

nese with a way of balancing extremes and have created the reasonableness that has marked Chinese life and thought.

We have seen that these centuries of upheaval were also the classical centuries of the development of Chinese thought, particularly in government and ethics. The nature of man, society, and the universe came under the scrutiny of great minds. Furthermore, just as a single state was beginning to emerge from the chaos of the old multistate system of Chou, so a new rationalism was beginning to replace the old primitivism still hanging on from Shang times.

By and large the Chinese philosophy of these times is a body of thought in which there is little concern with aesthetics or logic and in which knowledge is not presented for its own sake but as the intellectual and theoretical support for a way of life. It is theory arrived at through experience, and therefore the postulates are more intimately connected with real existence than is deemed usual in Western concepts. This may be because the great teaching masters were primarily concerned with re-establishing a decent social order, and immersed themselves in the question of a social and civic ethic. They were shrewd men, who knew the people and life around them. And it is important to remember they were working out their theories in an age when hereditary rule and rank seemed to be the most natural thing in the world. They were, except for Mo-tzu, members of the privileged class, and when one sees the uniformity with which the Confucians rank men according to occupation, placing mental occupations and hence scholars at the top, one cannot avoid the feeling that they were rationalizing their own role in society.

Chinese wisdom lay in the *via media*, and this kind of wisdom is eminently suited to the phenomena of experience; it shuns the extremes of speculation. Confucius, Mencius, Hsün-tzu, Mo-tzu, sensitive, intelligent men demonstrating different aspects of man's relation to man were great minds and professional altruists. In their own time they got nowhere. Neither did the Taoists, who could not have cared less. The first Chou thinkers to put their ideas into actual practice were the Legalists Han Fei and Li Ssu.

SCIENTIFIC SPECULATION

The philosophic schools of the Chou period were important in their contribution to basic ethical and governmental principles used as a model by later ages. Equally important are the proto-scientific theories that provided the impetus for Chinese science and technology, which until early modern times was equal if not superior to contemporary Western developments. The Taoists were of much significance in their stress on the nature of change and transformation—in their analysis of the concepts involved in metamorphic changes of insects, the processes of birth and death, the sequence of the seasons, and other related phenomena. From this evolved a relativity of outlook, particularly in regard to value structures, and an excessively anthropocentric view of the world. They developed an insight into time-scale, relative distance, and the absurdity of applying human standards to the whole world without regard to differences in function and forms.

Of different character and less enduring in influence were the Moists and the Logicians, who made rather sophisticated attempts to define basic logical concepts, analyze the character of correct reasoning, and deal with paradoxes arising from concepts much like those of the Eleatics. A third group were the naturalists associated with the concepts of Yin and Yang and the five elements. These philosophers attempted a careful study of the world, classifying mountains, rivers, and valleys, and cataloging birds and beasts, plants, and rare metals. Undoubtedly connected with alchemical purposes, these classifications were used as the basis for attempting to explain all change and relate all phenomena through the succession of the five elements and the alternation of the Yin and Yang, or positive and negative (light = dark, male = female), principles. Perhaps significantly, these philosophical groups were also associated with development of Chinese medicine.

Side by side with the development of a conceptual framework for Chinese science were notable advances in technology. As might be expected, agriculture was a chief beneficiary. These advances included the rise of intensive-culture farming, which

made possible greater densities of population; the invention of the animal-drawn plough; and the great expansion of irrigation systems. The last depended upon techniques of social organization developed by the Legalists and led to such enterprises as the construction of the great Cheng Kuo Canal, which irrigated the state of Ch'in, and an irrigation system in the Ch'engtu plain, constructed in 316 B.C., which is still in operation. Noteworthy also is the development of the technique for iron casting, centuries before it was known in the West. This made possible the use of iron tools.

From the earliest of times, the Chinese have enjoyed a decimal system of numbers along with a concept of place value. In the Warring States period, a blank space representing zero was in use on counting boards, on coins, and in a medical treatise. It is possible that extraction of square roots, widely attested in the Han period, was first discovered during this period.

In astronomy the Chinese were exceptionally developed. No less than seven records of eclipses have survived from the twelfth century B.C. The meridian passages of certain stars is observed by the middle of the Spring and Autumn period, though the methods of observation are still primitive even for the sixth century B.C., lacking calculations, measurements, or regularity. Yet progress was rapid, and in the fourth century B.C. we find three astronomers drawing up star catalogues, giving the positions of stars in degrees in a co-ordinate system. Most astronomical knowledge was associated with the calendar, on which the agriculture of China depended and to which certain important rituals were related. Already in the Shang dynasty the length of the year was calculated to be 365.25 days. During the Chou period attempts were made to refine this fraction and to determine the length of the lunar month, a matter of critical importance. (In the Shang dynasty its value had been calculated to be 29.53 days; its true value is 29.530588 days.)

Attempts were also made to describe with exactitude the movements of the heavenly bodies. Astronomers calculated the sidereal and synodic periods of the planets with accuracy comparable to that of the Greeks. Shih Shen in the fourth century B.C. was aware that the moon had something to do with solar eclipses

and he gave instructions for predicting them by determining the relative position of the moon to the sun. Astronomers apparently believed that the Yin influence of the moon overcame the Yang influence of the sun. The Chinese are credited with the record of a solar corona during an eclipse, the first record of a nova, records of comets, from 613 B.C., including a reference to Halley's comet dating to 240 (there may have been a sighting as early as 467, but the evidence is incomplete), and meteor showers of the Leonids in 644.

In matters of meteorology, we find Chinese attempts to predict weather by study of cloud forms and other atmospheric phenomena as early as 654 B.C., and the oracle-bone texts of the Sheng dynasty contain many meteorological observations. In the fourth century, a proto-scientific work records:

> the wind is the *ch'i* (inner force) of heaven, and the rain is the *ch'i* of earth. Wind blows according to the seasons and rain falls in respond to wind. We can say that the *ch'i* of the heavens comes down and the *ch'i* of the earth goes upward.*

This is a recognition of the water-cycle of evaporation, and a later work attributes this to the "rotation of the Tao." There is evidence that the Chinese recognized some relation between the tides and the phases of the moon.

Despite many promising beginnings in scientific observation, the Chinese failed to discover abstract laws that might decipher the universe. They held an organic view of the world in which all things were arranged in a hierarchy, each operating according to its own nature, and the whole held together by the harmonious co-operation of all beings. When they attempted abstraction formulations, it was for more human concerns. Thus we find that the third century philosopher Hsün-tzu classifies all substances in an ascending scale, rising from fire and water to man, whom he considers to be the noblest being in the world. Hsün-tzu suggests that an inner force is the principle of all things, but his concept is not scientific. Instead the harmonious union of the things in the world is his concern: "When heaven and earth

* J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959), Vol. III, p. 467.

are united, the myriad of things are brought forth; when the Yin and Yang interact, all change is generated." With the triumph of this viewpoint and the formation of a synthesis of Confucian and other schools into a single state ideology, many of the most promising insights of Chinese proto-scientific development lapsed into obscurity, to be rediscovered in later centuries.

THE CLASSICS

Writing is a mark of the Chou period in that there were not only a multitude of records and documents of all kinds but also a surprising number of books. The reader is already aware that among the great body of literary materials accepted traditionally as pre-Han there are several, generally called the Classics, that were early acknowledged to have canonical authority over the organization, operation, and ethics of the temporal order. The environment in which these classic ways of thought developed and the nature of the societies that nurtured them are still imperfectly known. In large measure we see the scholars and their thought through surviving texts attributed to certain men or groups of men. Furthermore, the interpretation of their writings and thought varied from age to age. Therefore at this point it is appropriate to state briefly the order and nature of the classical texts and the other great books of this age, and also to say something of their interpretation.

The Confucian Classics were originally five texts, called Confucian because men after Confucius assigned to him a personal role in their editing, compilation, and transmission. These attributes are extremely doubtful, but the doubt does not lessen the importance of the books. When Confucians came into intellectual and political power during the early Han dynasty, they made these books accepted sources for morality and right conduct and for the proper education of a man. From the Han era onward these books, along with some other texts of great authority, were the intellectual center of gravity for what Chinese civilization claimed to be. They were the vehicle of the moral law and for the ethical management of men and society. The Classics are as follows:

Shih Ching or *Book of Songs.* A collection of some three

hundred songs and poems representing the remnants of what was probably a much larger collection in antiquity. It is doubtful whether, as claimed, some of the songs date from the Shang era. However, many of them are authentically early Chou.

Li Chi or *Book of Rites.* This is a miscellany of texts containing materials concerned with everything from cosmological speculation to correct rules of conduct. Much of it can be dated back to the middle of the Chou era.

Shu Ching or *Book of Documents.* A collection of addresses, pronouncements, speeches, ordinances, and counsels of great rulers. A mixed bag of documents purporting to run from mythical Yao and Shun through the Chou period. Most of the surviving fragments are probably early Chou mixed in with later forgeries. However, the text represents very early sources of Chinese history and in many cases these documents might be the wellspring of much of the moral thought of Confucius. Tradition states he chose these selections for his pupils.

I Ching or *Book of Changes.* Undoubtedly a very old text dipping back into Shang times. It is a handbook, setting forth diagrammatic methods, for divination along with the interpretations of the diagrams. It has a core of very ancient text with later additions.

Ch'un Ch'u or *Spring and Autumn Annals.* This is a brief record of events that happened in and to the state of Lu during the period 722–418 B.C. It has to be read along with its traditional commentaries, and because its obscurity has lent itself to wide interpretations, what is essentially a chronicle has been given moral connotations.

These were not the only writings considered classic by Chinese scholars but they were in many respects the most respected and certainly formed the earliest canonical set of classic writings.

The Classics have passed down through centuries of scribes, scholars, and copyists, and even those texts that Confucius himself knew must have varied from what they had been centuries before him. At times several texts of all the Classics have existed side by side. In the case of the *Book of Documents,* where only fragments remain, sections of it live on in other surviving works that quoted it. The earliest extant texts of the Classics and

great books are all later than the life, times, and teachings of the men to whom they are attributed.

The nature of the Classics and the traditional thinking about them is linked to the kind of language in which they are written. They are not general analytical principles of human behavior such as we are used to in Western philosophical works, but for the most part statements of particular events and facts. We have already seen that the Chinese language in its concreteness suggests that the thought behind the language was antipathetic to anything not immediately perceived and that it tended always to purposes of instruction. The Japanese scholar Hajime Nakamura says that in Chinese thought, "What a man believes is only his eyes and ears. Everything else is doubted." He points out that Chinese philosophy does not use complex sentences, as does the West, in explaining metaphysical matters, but diagrams and concrete expressions instead.

The result of this kind of language and its concomitant thought is that in China ethics is not understood as a part of a universal law but is grasped only on the basis of particular experience. Men are placed in special circumstances, limited by time and space, and no two people can have the same experience. It is apparent that such a way of thought would not attempt to fix laws governing human life by abstractions but by precedent and by previous experience, which created a continuity of principles of authority. The authority of the Classics, for example, lay not so much in the content as in the fact that they were *per se* ancient, and as such were the mold for every jot and tittle of life. Such a heavy dependence on texts accessible only to the erudite did not mean that intellectual life was stifled in China. It simply meant that such life had to operate within the framework of the Classics.

[9]

The Founding of the Chinese Imperial State

THE LEGALISTS

The frontier state of Ch'in, which occupied the old Chou homeland in Shensi, was the final victor in the unification struggles of the fourth to second centuries B.C. In the third century it made itself into an efficient police state and then, between 299 and 221 B.C., it methodically, efficiently, and ruthlessly conquered, subverted or annexed its rivals, so that by the latter date the king of Ch'in could in justice call himself the First Emperor of China.

This triumph represented the ascendancy of principles of government unlike those just sketched, and of views on the nature of man and of society that, while seeming to break boldly with the traditional ways of thinking, yet represent a somewhat logical culmination of these ways. By their unsentimental approach to men and events and their advocacy of a rule of positive law regulating all aspects of life, these Legalists (often called Realists) of Ch'in were to earn the undying hatred and enmity of the advocates of all the other branches of thought. Because positive law applies to all men, regardless of rank and virtue, it

was distasteful to the Confucian schools. Obliterating the natural distinctions between superior men and others by means of law codes, claimed the Confucians, impeded the normal operation of benevolent principles as practiced by the virtuous elite. The Moists thought that man's primary obedience was not to the law of any state but to the law of Heaven, while to the Taoists the idea of law, in itself, was just too ridiculous, being simply another attribute of the misery organized man persists in creating for himself.

Yet it would be misleading to divorce the thought of the Legalists from all preceding thought, because since the time of Confucius the problem of final authority had been of increasing concern to the system builders and model makers as actual conditions went from bad to worse. Slowly the successors of Confucius began to consider a problem that Confucius tends to pass over. That is, how do you get people to do things if they don't want to do them? It is all very well for philosophers to talk of virtue and morality, but the altruism of ordinary men is shallow at the best of times, their capacity for the emulation of virtue is limited, and they are understandably loath to make sacrifices for the benefit of others. The silence of Confucius, in the face of this, is puzzling, because a fundamental of his teaching is that one must accept his role in society. He simply falls back on moral suasion and the force of tradition.

Mo-tzu wants authority, organization, and conformity for the general welfare, though his ultimate sanction is not positive but supernatural. Mencius will go a step further than his master. He will agree that men should seek their proper levels because of an inherent sense of what is correct, but he will give them a definite means of breaking with improper authority through popular revolt, although the sanction for this is rooted in Heaven. It is Hsün-tzu who wants a strong secular rule, to take in hand men who cannot think for themselves and whose natural passions need control. Yet he will place his ultimate trust in man's educability and looks for sanction in the canons of classical learning.

As generations pass and conditions degenerate in China, the philosophers are increasingly drawn to the idea of a positive authority. Even Taoists will conjecture a Sage so supernally a part of the universe and so beyond the petty nature of things that he

can rule as he wishes, both creating and destroying. The nature of power becomes a subject for action rather than contemplation, and it is almost inevitable that a way of thinking will evolve asserting that equal coercion under law is the best and indeed the only way of achieving the good society.

It was through the maximum use of legal compulsion that a single rule came into effect in China and that the Ch'in dynasty enjoyed its glory of twenty-four years. For this brief span history paid it back for the next two millenniums. Ch'in went down in the succeeding centuries as an execration, a horrible period of un-Chinese tyranny and an example of what happens when "barbarians" without benevolence and virtue rule. Yet without Ch'in and without the Legalists there might never have been the universal Chinese state and empire, for the Legalists put feudalism and internecine warfare to death, made one state of all the states, and established the unity prerequisite for centralization and empire, which the founders of the succeeding Han dynasty and every subsequent ruler of China used.

Ch'in held the same advantageous site in the Wei valley that the conquering Chou had held. Surrounded by great natural barriers of mountains and river, it could defend itself with ease and could attack the plains swiftly and forcefully. It had been hardened in frontier wars. Yet it was to take more than the blessings of terrain and military toughness to account for ultimate victory, because other larger Chinese states had good natural frontier positions, too, and were just as tough and forceful. The records give the credit to a form of internal organization that seems to be the product of the singlemindedness and tremendous administrative ability of Kung-sun Yang, the Lord Shang, chief minister of Ch'in from 359 to 338 B.C. Lord Shang set in motion a system that in six generations lifted Ch'in to dominion over China. His work was to be incorporated into the theoretical system of Han Fei and to be continued in the work of Li Ssu, organizer of the first empire and grand councilor to its first emperor.

LORD SHANG

Kung-sun Yang, a native of the state of Wei and a student of law, went as a young man to seek his fortune in Ch'in. The

ruler of Ch'in was always eager to have able men serve him, and Lord Shang quickly advanced in service from tutor to a high ministerial post.

Lord Shang advocated a system of power that, rejecting both tradition and virtue, would rely on detailed law codes strictly enforced to maintain peace and prosperity.

> The family that has a definite occupation does not have to starve to death in time of famine; the state that has definite laws does not go to ruin in case of emergency.*

In the case of Ch'in the larger objective was the eventual predominance over all other states, after a prelude of war. The first step toward this objective was an increase in the wealth and power of the state, which was accomplished by means of the political structure devised by Lord Shang. Each individual, high or low, was harnessed in state service. Since men would not voluntarily do that which was distasteful or difficult, particularly if they saw no way of deriving some personal benefit from it, then they would be compelled to serve. A quota system was established for the production of goods. Failure to attain the quota was punished by forced labor. These measures were enforced by severe laws, and the laws were sustained by, among other means, awards for the denunciation of offenders. Punishment as a deterrent seems based on the principle of a later Legalist:

> Fire appears severe, wherefore men rarely get burned; water appears tender, wherefore men often get drowned.†

There was unrest, protest, and dissatisfaction at first, but when the strictest punishment was even-handedly meted out to those who balked, including the crown prince of Ch'in, it was seen that King Hsiao and his minister Lord Shang meant business. Within a decade this royal absolutism, directed to the perfection of the arts of war and agriculture and the glory and profit of Ch'in, had produced order, stability, strength, and prosperity. The recalcitrant nobility had been shorn of their income and privileges by land reforms, which opened land to private

* W. K. Liao, trans., *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu* (London: Probsthain, 1939–1959), Vol. I, p. 163.

† *Ibid.*, p. 292.

ownership and, through direct taxes on the new freeholders, diverted the income from the landowning class to the state. To replace the old hierarchy, a new graded system of ranks was set up based on merit shown by merciless efficiency in the discharge of duties (although later rank was sold).

The real argument between Confucian scholars and the Legalists was not over whether or not there should be laws, a point that is vital in understanding how the imperial state was set up under the Han dynasty, but whether law should be positive law, applicable to all, or a code sanctioned by a canonical text, distinguishing between superior men and others. The Confucianists never flinched from the idea of either authority or law. They simply insisted that the rules of the game be based on the principles of their great ancient texts. In this manner the law would support the hierarchal system and privilege. It would of course be administered honestly and compassionately because it would be in the hands of ethical men who understood the fixities of tradition, local customs, and virtue. In a way the Confucianists were the first strict constructionists and states'-righters.

It was obvious that the dispossessed of high rank would nurse their hatred of Lord Shang, and when his protector King Hsiao died and the crown prince succeeded to the throne, the old enmity was repaid. Lord Shang was proscribed. He fled Ch'in, returned to incite a rebellion, and in 338 B.C. was killed. When he died, Ch'in was a great power in China and he was, in large measure, the architect. Looked at in perspective, what was accomplished in those years was the abolition of hereditary social status as a measure of power, the separation of land ownership from rank, with a consequent rise of a class of freeholding farm producers under tight state regulation, and the concentration of power in the hands of an appointed bureaucracy.

To a lesser extent this destruction of elites and the concomitant growth of administrative systems was taking place all over China of the late Chou period. The trend was more intense in Ch'in, however, because it boldly cast away the old idea that intrinsic worth made something right or wrong, good or bad. Under King Hsiao and Lord Shang, a thing was right or wrong because the law said so, speaking not for the greatest good of the greatest number but for the good of the state. The law oper-

ated independently of ethics because that which was right helped the state and that which was wrong hurt it.

> Men of remote antiquity strove to be known as moral and virtuous; those of the middle age struggled to be known as wise and resourceful; and now men fight for the reputation of being vigorous and powerful. . . . Thus, we see that the ancients and moderns have different customs, new and old have different measures. To govern with generous and lenient regulations a people in imminent danger is the same as to drive wild horses without reins or slips. This is a calamity of ignorance.*

HAN FEI

The techniques of power that are called Legalist or Realist were described and systematized in the writings of Han Fei. We do not know when he was born, but he died in 233 B.C. He was an aristocrat from the state of Han, at one time a pupil of Hsün-tzu, and had been sent by his home state as its personal envoy to the ruler of the state of Ch'in, who became his friend.

It happened that the third of the great Legalists was at that time a minister to the throne of Ch'in, and this man, Li Ssu, monumentally ambitious, had been a fellow pupil of Han Fei's under Hsün-tzu. For reasons unclear but probably due to personal jealousy and fear of the loss of royal favor, Li Ssu managed some trumped-up charges against his friend. Before the charges could be adjudicated, Han Fei, apprehensive of conviction and execution, took poison.

The lengthy collected writings of Han Fei will seem, in their modern translation, more familiar than any other work from the classical period. They are also an excellent synthesis of all previous writers who applied a rationalistic approach to government. Where obscurity, indirection, and mysticism, may seem the hallmark of much Chinese thought, Han Fei is clear, direct, and completely comprehensible.

The success of the principles of Legalism was, in large measure, an indication of the weakness of the other schools. None of the Schoolmasters or their disciples had been able to bring order out of chaos. When only strength gave security, almost every-

* *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 279–280.

thing held in honor by the schools and by tradition seemed mocked by the march of events. For centuries power had been abused, and there could no longer be even a pretense that the states operated on traditional moral principles. According to Han Fei, a system could be so organized as to bring to the fore, in an objective way, the kind of able men whom a ruler needs:

> The intelligent sovereign makes the law select men and makes no arbitrary promotion himself. He makes the law measure merits and makes no arbitrary regulation himself. In consequence able men cannot be obscured, bad character cannot be disguised, those falsely praised cannot be advanced and those wrongly defamed cannot be degraded.*

He then uses these men to the limit:

> The proper way for an intelligent ruler is that he should make the wise men exhaust their brains and make his decisions accordingly, without being himself at his wit's end, and he should make the worthy men exert their talents and appoint them to public office accordingly, without being himself at the end of his ability.†

The Legalists saw what was. The Confucians saw what should be. Throughout the writings of the Legalists the voice of mercy and justice is silent and politics are ruled by self-interest and strength. The earlier analogy from Thucydides can be stretched to include a parallel between the actions of Ch'in and the actions of Athens against Melos, for as the Athenian envoy told the Melians:

> You know as well as we do that the question of right only arises between equals in power and that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must . . . of the gods we believe, of men we know, that it is the law of their nature to rule whenever they can.‡

In Han Fei's time the great objective of the powerful states was the overlordship of China, which when achieved could not

* Chen En-cheng, "Hans Fei's Principle of Government by Law," *Chinese Culture,* I:40 (April 1958), p. 77.

† Sah Ming-wu, "The Impact of Hanfeism on the Earlier Han Censorial System," *Chinese Culture,* I:1 (July 1957), p. 77.

‡ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War,* R. Livingstone, trans. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), pp. xxiii–xxiv.

be maintained on old principles of moral suasion. Only a strict and pervasive law could support this kind of power, a law that would eliminate all attributes of compassion, which might cause men to deviate from the single purpose of ordering the life of the state. Han Fei writes that this can be achieved because even parents primarily motivated by selfish interests:

> . . . parents in relation to children when males are born, congratulate each other, and when females are born, hardly care for them at all. Since both come from [the flesh of] the parents, why should boys receive congratulations and girls be ill treated? Because parents, in consideration of their own personal convenience, calculate the future benefits to be derived from children.*

In explanation of the contempt the Legalists had for the scholars, it should be remembered that unlike the scholars the Legalists held responsible office of one kind or another. Faced by real situations they theorized that the restoration of public order depended upon the elimination of the traditional pillars of Chinese society: the family, moral education, and the noble class. The family system was divisive of loyalty, moral education was impractical, and the nobility excluded themselves from the operation of the law. Han Fei and his followers were not caste-conscious. Actually they were levelers of society, for in their system all men were equal except rulers. They were technicians of power who felt that while you cannot guarantee the efficacy of an individual, you can of a system. Said Han Fei the skeptic:

> If a ruler believes in date selecting, worships gods and demons, puts faith in divination, and likes luxurious feasts, then ruin is probable.†

His followers were Legalists because their chief instrument was law promptly and universally administered.

> There may be one case in ten million where the directing guidance of the law is not needed and yet it is correct in everything. Therefore the Sage governs the empire for the ten million cases.‡

* Liao, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 239.

† Needham, *op. cit.*

‡ J. Duyvendak, trans., *The Book of Lord Shang* (London: Probsthain, 1928), p. 334.

It was Han Fei's view that so few men are virtuous that the law cannot be concerned for them. In Confucius' time goodness was possible because men were scarce and goods plentiful, but now the reverse was true. Indeed the operation of what are normally considered as human virtues was seen by Han Fei as an impediment.

> Now suppose there is a boy who has a bad character. His parents are angry at him but he never makes any change. The villagers in the neighborhood reprove him, but he is never thereby moved. His masters teach him, but he never reforms. Thus with all the three excellent disciplines, the love of his parents, the conduct of the villagers and the wisdom of the masters applied to him, he makes no change, not even a hair of his shins is altered. It is, however, only after the district magistrate sends out soldiers in accordance with the law to search for wicked men that he becomes afraid and changes his ways and alters his deeds. So the love of parents is not sufficient to educate children. But if it is necessary to have the severe penalties of the district magistrate come at all, it is because people are naturally spoiled by love and obedient to authority.*

THE NATION BUILDERS

In 221 B.C. King Cheng of Ch'in subdued the last of his rivals. The outcome of the centuries of war and adaptation and of the political pamphleteering of the Legalists was the single authoritarian state he now established with himself as Ch'in Shih Huang Ti—the First August Emperor of the Ch'in dynasty. So sure was he of the future that he prescribed that the rulers of his line would always take the title Huang Ti, prefacing it with the number of their succession. That is, as he was First Emperor, his immediate successor would be Second Emperor and his successor Third Emperor and so on.

He was a man of cruel and arbitrary actions, erratic in disposition and singularly bereft of respect for the established order, as should befit the overlord of All under Heaven. He had ruled Ch'in on the principles of Lord Shang and Han Fei and he continued these principles in running an empire. At the same time he was fascinated by magic and divination and like so many

* Liao, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 282–283.

tyrants had a yearning for immortality, which he strove to attain through the practice of magical Taoism. His sensitivity on matters that touched on his rule can be seen in the story that when some learned men around him began to mutter of despotism, he ordered five hundred of them punished. It is doubtful that, as Ssu-ma Ch'ien wrote, the five hundred were buried alive. That they were harshly dealt with cannot be doubted. Also beyond doubt is a report of his treatment of his eldest son. When the heir, Fu-su, remonstrated with the First Emperor, he was exiled to the army on the frontier.

It is difficult to ascribe the massive achievements of this reign to a man of such arbitrary appetites, and it is generally believed that the final unification of China, the abolition of feudalism, and the political, legal, and economic measures that sustained the Ch'in state were the work of that brilliant pupil of Hsün-tzu and fellow student of Han Fei, Li Ssu, grand councilor of the First Emperor. We have already seen something of the measure of Li Ssu in his destruction of Han Fei. He was an ambitious young man for whom the rising state of Ch'in was a lodestone. He came there in 247 B.C. to serve as a petty functionary, but it was not long before he had risen through the ranks to a ministerial position, and when King Cheng assumed the title of emperor, Li Ssu became his grand councilor. Li Ssu not only eradicated the hereditary rank and privilege in China, but also, under great pressures, preserved the new unity.

The First Emperor died in 210 B.C., and Li Ssu, who had consolidated his position through contracting excellent marriages for his children, acted to keep the death secret while searching for a docile successor. The legal claimant was the emperor's eldest son, Fu-su, but it was believed that if recalled from his frontier military service, he would have sacked Li Ssu. Therefore a letter of disinheritance was forged in favor of a manipulatable younger brother, Hu-hai, who became Second Emperor.

The Second Emperor proved to be a stubborn fool. Disregarding the advice of Li Ssu, he ruled the state with the aid of his favorite, Chao Kao, the grand chamberlain. Chao Kao was equally a fool, who could conceive of ruling China only through increasing the severity of the laws of the First Emperor. The

only man who might have preserved the dynasty was ignored and he, Li Ssu, taking the only course open to a sycophant, presented to the emperor memorials that agreed with and justified his disastrous policies. This was done despite the fact that rebellions were already breaking out and that such a course of action would shortly wipe out everything that the First Emperor and Li Ssu had spent decades building. Li Ssu's lickspittle policy did not save him, for the vanity of Chao Kao was enormous and he arranged to have Li Ssu indicted, tortured, and executed as a preliminary to seizing the throne himself. A successful attempt was then made to unsettle the mind and will of the Second Emperor by staging a fake raid of rebels upon the imperial palace. This so frightened the Second Emperor that, we are told, he committed suicide. But when Chao Kao assumed the throne, he found that absolutely no one wanted him, and he was obliged to surrender it to an uncle of the Second Emperor. This uncle, well understanding how both Li Ssu and the Second Emperor came to their deaths, wasted no time in having Chao Kao murdered. It was, in a sense, a wasted action, for the rebellions set in motion under the First Emperor and fanned by the Second swept the Third off his throne after only a few days.

THE FIRST CHINESE IMPERIAL STATE

The remnants of feudalism, the old territorial divisions of China, and the privileges of the ancient clan elites were irrevocably smashed in 221 B.C., when the First Emperor divided his empire into thirty-six commanderies, subdivided into prefectures. From this time on China would be ideally conceived of as a single unit, although the name and number of administrative divisions would vary and the empire would undergo long periods of disunion and conquest. Each commandery was governed by appointed military and civil officials and each prefecture by an appointed prefect, and all were responsible to the emperor at Hsien Yang. Since such administrative structure emulated not only the Ch'in system but governing practices in other Chou states, it is surprising that there were those around the First Emperor who expected him to parcel out the empire among his favorites and intimates in the ancient manner. On the contrary,

not only were the old clan aristocrats, hitherto the only repository of power, rendered politically impotent, but the immediate members of the First Emperor's family were excluded from any feudal division of the spoils. Those members of the aristocracy of the former states who had not already been wiped out or declassed by generations of political strife and internecine warfare were transported—the histories say some 120,000 families—to the region of the capital at Hsien Yang in Shensi, where they could be kept under surveillance, a move reminiscent of the Duke of Chou's action nine hundred years before against the Shang nobility. In their place a unified empire was to be governed through an appointed officialdom responsible only to the emperor, and the emperor's word was, in accord with Legalist principles, the law:

> Nothing is more valuable than the royal person, more honorable than the throne, more powerful than the authority of the sovereign and more august than the position of the ruler. These four excellences are not obtained from outside or secured from anybody else, but are deliberated in the ruler's own mind and acquired thereby.*

The old nobility was never to recover from this, nor was there ever again to be a fragmentation of China into separate states. For almost half a millennium, since the beginning of Eastern Chou, the Chinese had been moving toward empire. The exact shape was never clear, and it is not possible to think that the nobility of Chou foresaw the day when their own misuse of power would lead to their disenfranchisement as a class and the emergence of a pragmatic legal autocracy based on the coldest principle of power. While the dynasty that founded the Chinese imperial state was only an interlude, it did such a thorough job that all later rulers of China and their administrators and ministers thought in imperial, not regional or local, terms. It is true that the succeeding dynasts of Han restored feudalism in the sense that, side by side with their commanderies and prefectures, some feudal states were set up. But these were measures of reward to the faithful around the first Han emperors, and they represented lifetime vestments only. By the end of the first century the few

* *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 29.

fiefs remaining in China were an anachronism and were expiring, one by one, with their masters.

Many of the learned men who were part of the official family of the First Emperor were Confucians of one kind or another. They were addicted to the feudal past. They viewed the massive centralization and legal rigor of the Ch'in dynasty as something indecent, and therefore they imprudently advised the First Emperor, in 213 B.C., to infeudate his empire, in emulation of the presumed great empires of antiquity. This was suicidal advice, and Li Ssu in arguing against it successfully advised the emperor that these men and the class they represented be punished for what was, in effect, an attempt to weaken the government. He deemed the most suitable punishment to be the destruction of the textual sources to which they appealed, thus bringing an end to the multiplicity of teachings that addled men's minds and weakened the laws of the empire.

> If such conditions are not prohibited, the imperial power will decline above, and partisanships will form below. It is expedient that these be prohibited. Your servant requests that all persons possessing works of literature, the Shih [*Book of Odes*], the Shu [*Book of History*] and the discussions of the various philosophers should destroy them with remission of all penalty. Those who have not destroyed them within thirty days after the issuing of the order, are to be banned and sent to do forced labor. Books not to be destroyed will be those on medicine and pharmacy, divination . . . , and agriculture and arborculture.*

It was this measure, more than any other single act, that earned for the Ch'in the undying hatred of the Chinese literati.

The destruction of texts and the contempt for orthodoxy were never forgiven. Yet, upon closer examination, this very same destruction was to be a boon for generations of Chinese scholars. For the loss of many texts provided a livelihood thenceforth for Han scholars, who tried to reconstruct them from oral records plus surviving fragments. Since the Han literati were not above falsification and false attribution, Chinese studies were to be

* D. Bodde, *China's First Unifier: A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu, 280(?)–208* B.C. (Leiden: Brill, 1938), pp. 23–24.

hag-ridden for two thousand years about the authenticity of the Han versions, thus providing an additional source of profitable work for scholars. Furthermore, the destruction of historical records, which Li Ssu thought would enable history to be rewritten from the Ch'in standpoint, was a favor to the Han dynasty in that it enabled the Han historians to treat the past according to their desires and preconceptions. Actually no one knows just how much was destroyed—certainly the dangerous philosophical works and the histories with Confucian implications. Those who have studied the matter believe that not as much was burnt as was lost when the archives and library of the Ch'in dynasty were destroyed in the sack of Hsien Yang by the rebels.

The literati were neither personally punished nor deprived of their positions. If they could legitimately detest the Ch'in for the burning of the books, they did owe some gratitude for the fact that by the same kind of imperial fiat the multiple scripts and variant characters of written Chinese were suppressed in favor of a single standard script, a major factor in the continuity of Chinese civilization.

The new state was not built solely through a central administration or a censorship of learning. Aspect after aspect of life was brought under regulation by one or another legal or economic measure. The universal authority could best cut a new pattern of empire by absolute elimination of regional and local particularism in life and economy. This meant standardization—of currency, weights and measures, and roads, and a uniform system of law was effected. Agriculture was strongly encouraged, while commerce was discouraged. Yet the benefits to be expected from the creation of a yeoman class and the regulation of economic life were nullified by the imposition of extraordinary taxes. Actually the yeoman class never formed, because when land became alienable it was absorbed by a few wealthy and powerful families.

The very severity of the law, embodying a list of tortures, mutilations, and variants of execution that compare favorably with the penal codes of Europe in later times, was the cause of its own breakdown. Men certain of injustice, and liable to the severest penalties for minor infractions, would sooner rebel than

exist under such a system. Even the famous five-household system of mutual denunciation was insufficient to stifle rebellion. Under this system every member of a household was responsible for the acts of every other member, and groups of five families were mutually hostage for the actions of each family within the group.

Yet to give Ch'in its due, the exactions of an arbitrary positive law were probably not as important in the ultimate downfall of the dynasty as the simple fact that the economy of China was still suffering from the previous generations of war. The material destruction cumulating over centuries was too vast to make the Ch'in unification anything more than economically superficial, while the enormous cost of a large standing army, the colossal drain of labor and money spent in building the Great Wall, and possible corruption even among the Legalists in high places all contributed to the fatal weakening of the first empire.

[10]

The Ch'in Empire

Originally we described the China of the Chou dynasty as constituting the Yellow River plain and the loess highlands. This China runs in an east-west line. From the fertile but relatively indefensible plains of the east to the defensible but less rich hills and valleys of the west, despite the differences in terrain, there is great similarity of environment and a relative ease of communication. By 221 B.C., China, or rather China proper, came to mean not any specific territorial designation with fixed boundaries but all the territory under the effective control of a legitimate ruling dynasty. Therefore, since 221 B.C. China proper has contracted and expanded depending upon the fortunes of empire, and since its ruling dynasts tended to change the official names of places, any true representation of the frontiers of China proper at all times is difficult if not impossible.

The China of Ch'in included not only the east-west line of the Yellow River but also the south-north line running from Shensi to the valley of the Huai River, an area whose terminals were quite dissimilar in climate and environment and were not easy of communication. To the south of the Yangtze area, which Ch'in had taken over when it conquered Ch'u, the country ran for a thousand miles through rich, fertile subtropics dominated by

multi-ethnic, non-Chinese tribal cultures. To the north the loess lands faded away into the steppes. The great imperial problem of Ch'in China was how to defend itself from the north and west while at the same time penetrating the rich south. Not that this was especially a Ch'in problem. It was the overriding concern of every succeeding ruling house in China.

THE OPENING OF THE SOUTH

The main movement of Chinese expansion was to the south and the southwest, where the tribal peoples of the rich, wet, fertile lands lying between the Yangtze and the West rivers were to be slowly overrun by the Yellow River and incorporated into the Chinese scheme of things. The penetration of this area was not difficult except for the mountainous coastal regions of Chekiang and Fukien. The great southern area known as Lingnan (Kwangtung and Kwangsi) was first opened by a Chinese empire in 224 B.C., when a mercenary army was sent in by the First Emperor. The area was occupied and then organized into three commanderies, which were to serve both as a buffer for China proper and as a pale of settlement for criminals and exiles. The southern tribes did not take this expedition and occupation easily, and a series of revolts so unsettled Chinese power that a series of Ch'in expeditionary forces of extraordinary size (the sources speak of half a million Chinese in the forests and jungles of the south), operating on canals carved from the Yellow River to the West River, were needed between 221 and 214 B.C. to bring the south under effective occupation.

By 214 the southern frontier of the Ch'in empire was on the Red River, and the eastern half of the northern and central parts of the Indochinese peninsula had been organized, along with parts of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, into the commandery of Hsiang. Fukien was the commandery of Min-chung; the remainder of Kwangtung was the commandery of Nan-hai, and the remainder of Kwangsi that of Keui-lin. Tens of thousands of settlers were sent into these areas, particularly Kiangsi and Hunan. Tribute and taxes were collected, but local ways were little disturbed.

This penetration and settlement of the south were an enor-

mous drain on the empire. When in 214 B.C. resident Chinese garrisons were badly defeated and it became necessary to send in new forces, the empire was already in its death throes. The general commanding in the south seized his advantage, closed the passes leading to the north, and set up Ling-nan as the kingdom of Nan Yüeh. Since this commander, Chao-t'o, was a northerner, he easily became a vassal king of the succeeding Han dynasty, although maintaining his independence—so much so that he added what is now Tonkin to his territory. When the Han dynasty, apprehensive about the growing size and power of the great southern kingdom, embargoed him, he crossed the mountains into China proper and gave himself the title emperor of Nan Yüeh, though he later abandoned it when conciliated by the Han court.

Chao-t'o's work was of great future importance. It meant that, when an enormous expansion of the Chinese empire began in the first century and the kingdom of Nan Yüeh was incorporated with the empire, the way had already been eased for the south to become a part of Chinese life and tradition. Furthermore, there was in this frontier area a constant absorption of numbers of tribal people into Ch'in-Chinese civilization. This was true of all the states on the periphery of the China of the great central plain, but more so in Ch'in. What they brought to Ch'in in addition to sheer numbers and a kind of raw energy, not consonant with the settled agrarian-metropolitan life of the plains, was an effective kind of cavalry warfare, which, when wedded to the Ch'in talent for total mobilization of resources, made for the most formidable striking force of the age.

THE GREAT WALL

To the north and west the problem was not one of penetration and exploitation but of defense, and since antiquity walls had been built against the steppe people. The tribal confederations north and south of the great bend of the Yellow River and running west along the Mongolian plains were, unlike the quasi-Sinicized, settled farmers of the south, a serious menace to China. These northern and western regions were ideally suited for cavalry warfare. The Mongolian plains are connected to steppes of

Central Asia by passes that lead through the T'ien-shan and Altai ranges, and the whole range formed an enormous corridor for attack and retreat. The western steppes are well watered, with abundant pasture. The Mongol plateau is drier but still excellent horse country. Here on the steppe were the first true horse fighters, for in antiquity their western neighbors, the Persians, fought on foot, while their Chinese neighbors used the horse to pull the chariot. In the first part of the first millennium B.C. the steppe people became effective cavalry with their development of the tree saddle. This saddle has a raised pommel, a cantle, and stirrups, and enables a cavalryman to pay attention to his weapons.

Because of their effective military organization—for along with their new saddle they had a disciplined cavalry charge, using the lance and a long-range armour-piercing arrow shot from a compound bow—they were formidable enemies of the Chinese south of their zone. On those occasions when they banded together under an able leader, they constituted an overwhelming threat to the Chinese state to the south.

The primary defense problem facing Ch'in China was to protect itself against the great Hsiung-nu confederation of the Ordos. Driving north and west, Chinese armies temporarily defeated the Hsiung-nu and drove them out of the Ordos. Then, to set up a barrier against their return, the line of the Yellow River was fortified and that area linked together by military roads, the Ordos was colonized by Chinese, and to the west the Szechuan area was seized and colonized. Finally, the existing defensive walls of the former northern states were connected into one great wall running from the sea to Kansu, accomplished by enormous masses of forced labor, a feat that has been execrated ever since for its cost of human life.

This wall, with its double purpose of warding off nomad attacks and preventing Chinese from escaping to the easier life of the steppe (no taxes, no forced labor), was not an absolute frontier line sharply demarking Chinese from nomad or the farmer from cattle raiser. It represented, as Owen Lattimore, the pioneer of Inner Asian studies, has pointed out brilliantly, a zone south of which tribes tended to become Sinicized and north of which Chinese tended to become tribalized, when each had moved into the

respective maximum limits of the frontier zone. It then acted as a shock absorber for that area over which the Chinese empire could exercise effective control. Within this great frontier zone there lived a congeries of tribal peoples from Manchuria to Tibet, who represented the balance of power between the Chinese and the nomads in that either Chinese expansion outward or nomad attack inward depended for its success on the activity or passivity of these "intermediate social groups."

Not the great and destructive Yellow River but the frontier of Inner Asia was to be "China's sorrow" for millennia, as neither a wall nor colonization was to be more than temporarily effective.

{ 11 }

The New Men of Han

The rebellions against Ch'in broke in East China in 209 B.C. and were so widespread and so intensively fought that the efficient troops and commanders of the empire could not cope with them. Originating as acts of desperation by men without rank, the uprisings started with no ideology except dedication to the end of tyranny. Leadership of the revolt gravitated toward Hsiang Yu, an aristocrat from southern Kiangsu, and toward one of his allied troop commanders, Liu Pang, a village official of no status whom oppression had turned to banditry as well as rebellion.

In 206, while Hsiang Yu cleaned up East China, Liu Pang was sent westward to take Hsien Yang. After a year of raising troops, fighting Ch'in armies, sometimes losing and sometimes winning, Liu Pang entered the undefended capital in the winter of 207 B.C. and took the surrender of the last Ch'in ruler. The occupation was gentle, Liu Pang having been promised the region for his own. But when his commander, Hsiang Yu, arrived, that aristocrat sacked, burned, and looted the city (this indeed was the real destruction of the ancient learning, far more devastating than Li Ssu's arson) and killed all the Ch'in family. He then divided China among his friends and allies in the old Chou manner, made the weak king of Ch'u the emperor of China, and took for himself the title of lord protector.

Liu Pang was fobbed off with the small state of Han. Disgruntled, he proceeded to organize an uprising against Hsiang Yu. Despite his ability and the fact that the popular mood was with him, Liu Pang was at first badly defeated; but he withdrew to his natural fortress in Shensi, continued the civil war from there, and in 202 B.C. won the struggle. His adherents proclaimed him emperor. He modestly accepted and, establishing his capital at Chang-an in Shensi, continued the work of empire.

It was by now obvious that of all variations of government, two were unacceptable in China. One was the aristocratic feudalism of Chou, which had been attempted by Hsiang Yu; the other was the sheer legal despotism of Ch'in. Liu Pang, now emperor Han Kao-tsu, was ideally qualified to effect the expedient working synthesis that the ravaged empire needed. He and most of the men around him were commoners. Commoners had begun the revolt. Commoners had won it. Although a genealogy could have been fabricated for the first Han emperor, Kao-tsu remained a commoner in word and deed, sometimes too much so for the more delicate courtiers around him. The advantages of his origin were many. He had no classical education to struggle against. He had long experience in war and politics. He cared little for pomp, ceremony, and rituals. He understood that one never pushed matters to extremes. He was a shrewd and excellent politician with much experience in handling men, and he practiced conciliating those he conquered. After the disasters of the preceding generation, he was the suitable man to effect an amalgam of strong and efficient government.

By fiat the new dynasty relieved China of an interminable and harsh legal absolutism, but at the same time it exercised its power firmly. It masked centralism. It cultivated popular support. (For example, a general amnesty was ordered in 201 B.C.) The method is best described as a pragmatic centralization denying the use of power to groups that had previously misused it and placing it in the hands, by and large, of men with few axes to grind. It admitted a partial but weak feudalism in certain localities to satisfy the followers of the victor, writing finis to the hereditary power holders, leaving local affairs alone as much as feasible, and making use of the administrative qualities of scholars.

The limited tenure feudalism permitted was in the shape of fiefs that went to friends and allies. However, the newly enfeoffed men were a service nobility, their patents and grants being revocable by the emperor, and the individual or family was sustained in fief only as long as their services were of use. High office went to friends as a matter of patronage. Kao-tsu's own family were not lavishly regarded, the new emperor stepping cautiously in this matter. As for the men upon whom he had to depend most, all were steeped in a classical education and understood the practice of royal courts, and he needed them to keep precedence and order in the rough group around him. They were conservators of the past, and though new men were in power, old principles were needed and valued. Finally, they had stood with the new emperor through his wars, had been a part of his victory, and offered their loyalty and ability. Kao-tsu's past political experience led him to cultivate a practice of the utmost importance in the future governance of China. He permitted his advisers to suggest what should be done rather than seeming to initiate policies and procedure himself. This practice avoided the taint of centralism and shifted whatever blame arose to advisers.

It should be remembered that the Ch'in unification had been a military bond of the old Chou states and the peripheral areas such as the Yangtze states and the Ling-nan region. So long as the military commandants could maintain the peace, the union would last. The original Han government seems to have considered that the longer the union lasted, the better the chance to forge those common political and cultural bonds in China that would do away with the need for military controls and diminish the strong centrifugal tendencies among the Chinese regions. This thinking led to the creation of that pragmatic balance of authority that so marks the imperial Chinese state, wherein a nexus of power is wielded by a shifting group of central government officials and transmitted for execution to local officials. Within the central group the balance of power will swing to now one and now another man or group of men, and the nature of the men and groups constituting this central well of power will change from time to time, but immutably at the center is the emperor.

The government of the Han empire was only in its initial phases with the reign of Kao-tsu, but we can observe during the

years of his rule the consistent avoidance of anything resembling tyranny. The first four successor reigns are somewhat like Kao-tsu's, although during the Second Emperor's time the regency of Kao-tsu's widow, the Empress Lu, is significant for her efforts to place her family in control of China and to steal the empire from its rightful heir. Yet so deep was the desire to avoid shattering the hard-won peace of China that this important struggle was waged within the palace, and although extirpation awaited the loser, the external affairs of government were easily and benevolently handled. Because the empress lost, her family was wiped out and that of Kao-tsu resumed power.

The experience of powerful officials with the ambitions of the Empress Lu intensified the Han trend toward the interior diffusion of power. Traditionally, whatever their former fortunes, the family of an empress shared in her greatness, and if she were the mother of an heir, they could attempt to manipulate her in their own behalf. Sensing this, the advisers selected as the third Han ruler the Emperor Wen, a man exceptionally sensitive to the general welfare and possessing a goodness of heart and meekness of spirit that endeared him to his people and his ministers. The prosperity and good nature of his reign were marred only by an economizing on defense, which weakened seriously the strength of China and permitted the great tribal raids into China in the years 166 and 159 B.C. Probably as important as the breakdown of defense on the borders was Emperor Wen's belief that nature provided portents of the moods and intents of the gods, which made him an easy mark for ambitious men. It was the Emperor Wen who set the precedent whereby the emperor gave fortune and office to those believed favored by the gods. In the succeeding reign of Emperor Ching, still another precedent in government was set. In 154 B.C. a combination of seven vassal fiefs revolted because of familial jealousies and private irritations. The revolt was put down, and the crushing of these seven vassal kinglets marks the end of vassal influence and the tacit acknowledgment of the supremacy and continuity of a central imperial power.

During these first fifty-six years of the Han dynasty there was a genuine regard for farmers and farming, a reduction of taxes and corvées, and a return of prosperity. The widespread

use of able clerks, enlightened government, and the shrewd benevolence of the imperial family all made for a reign of men and not of laws. But although the laws of Ch'in were abolished, the administrative rules and penal laws of Han were many and strict. The whole existing structure could not simply be pulled to pieces and then rebuilt by the men of Han. They had to use what was at hand, and that was, in part, the bureaus and the rules of Ch'in. Therefore many Ch'in practices were carried forward under the guidance of Confucianists, but they were simply and intelligently applied. The most benevolent of governments has to maintain law and order if it wishes to maintain its power.

The main feature of Early Han was the reconstruction of China through the avoidance of extremes. Affairs were still dominated by a patriciate of sorts, but instead of being a hereditary aristocracy, it was a combination of scholars and men of affairs who served at the pleasure of the emperor and were loyal to his principles. Human relations did not change. The hierarchic principle remained in effect. What changed during this period is what might be called the theology of the state. Confucian teachings became the guidelines for enforcing Legalist regulations. The direct absolutism of the First Emperor became the indirect autocracy of Han Kao-tsu.

PART II

THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF THE CHINESE STATE AND EMPIRE IS SET

[12]

The Pattern of Government

THE MONARCH

By the reign of Han Wu Ti (140 to 87 B.C.), the able men whom Liu Pang had recruited, men hardened in war, pacification, and reconstruction, had gradually through death and retirement been replaced by erudite and learned men. These men, reared in the decades of peace and good living, were often ignorant of the real affairs of the state and sometimes far more absorbed in matters of prestige and scholarly reputation or in the emoluments of their positions. If Han China was to continue to grow, if it was to maintain the prosperity and peace that rested on the unity of its interior and the security of its frontiers, some authoritative hand had to grasp the reins of power. This was to be Han Wu Ti, who became the first Han emperor to rule rather than merely reign.

By conventional standards, his rule marked the high point of the Han dynasty, its most expansive, secure, and dynamic era. Coming to the throne at the age of fifteen, Wu Ti resolved to take into his own hands all the power of the Chinese state. That he was an uncommonly capable, even brilliant, ruler is freely admitted by the Han historians, who chronicled his many gifts, his tremendous energy and vigor, his strong will, and his achieve-

ments, which were many. He threw back the barbarians and made China's frontiers secure; he built roads, dug canals, and restrained the destructive Yellow River; and in countless ways he improved the infrastructure of the Chinese government. Yet the price of his accomplishments was judged too high, both by his contemporaries and by his successors, a judgment expressed in Pan Ku's eulogy in the official Han history:

> If Emperor Wu, with his superior ability and his great plans, had not departed from the modesty and economy of [Emperors] Wen and Ching, and if, by means of [these principles] he had helped the common people, in what respects could [any of] those [heroes who are] praised in the *Book of Odes* or in the *Book of History* have surpassed him?*

Wu Ti exhausted the resources of the empire with his continual demands for grandiose schemes; he undermined the unwritten Han constitution, which limited the powers of the emperor; he dissipated the wealth of the realm in pursuits of supernatural beings and through handouts to relatives of palace favorites; and he greatly increased the severity and harshness of the laws and rules, so that thousands were prosecuted for offenses and "it became difficult for anyone to keep out of prison except by the favor of the emperor or of some official."† Property was confiscated, thousands were lost in military expeditions, and even horses become scarce. As his reign continued, Wu Ti developed a megalomania fed by fawning Confucians, sycophantic courtiers, and compliant officials. He imagined himself another First Emperor, and like his model he undertook tours of the countryside searching for the elixir of immortality.

Most serious of his faults in the eyes of many critics was his autocratic manner. Giving Confucians a monopoly on governmental positions, in order to appear officially concerned about morality, he transformed them into instruments of his personal will. Power and influence came to depend not upon office, but on one's relation to the emperor. Gone was the important check

* H. H. Dubs, trans., *History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938–1955), Vol. II, p. 120.
† *Ibid.*, p. 12.

that tradition and usage had provided in delegating power to capable subordinate officials who were held accountable for failures and errors. Now that the emperor himself held direct power, criticism was unthinkable. In concentrating power in his own person, the emperor changed the whole character of government.

High positions became meaningless as real power and influence shifted to secretaries and lesser officials who enjoyed the confidence of the government. Competing factions engaged in endless intrigues, which led to the excesses of "harem politics," a system that brought relatives of harem favorites to positions of considerable power. Fortunately these practices were not passed on to the successors of Wu Ti. He was sagacious enough to select as his heir a child whose mother was dead and who could not therefore be dominated, and he chose as his regent a commoner whose ability and judgment he trusted.

The reign of Wu Ti marks a fundamental shift in the power relationship between local society and the central authority of the imperial government. The imperial government, prior to 154 B.C., had been concentrated in the west; the eastern plains were under the control of the imperial relatives, whose loyalty was always questionable. Already in the reign of Wen Ti, a model Confucian ruler, ministers had urged that the emperor himself "supervise the functions of the numerous officials and understand the usages of government." Both men stressed the need to concentrate power in the central government, and both seem to have believed that the emperor must take personal control over the government. During the reign of Ching, Wen Ti's successor, a revolt of seven feudal lords was put down in 154 B.C., and the central government gained a substantial concentration of power.

What Wu Ti attempted, then, in response to conditions that had been assessed by earlier officials, was in some respects the blending of Confucian and Legalist principles into a state ideology, sheltered under the name of the Sage. Wu Ti did not dispense with the ministers of state; he merely retained those, like Kung-sun Hung, whose views accorded with his own. Though anyone who directly criticized his decisions or policies or defended an unpopular person at court was dealt with severely, Wu Ti did not persecute scholars of the Confucian persuasion.

Significantly, it was in his reign that the first commoner, Kung-sun Hung, was appointed chancellor. The newly risen commoners owed their position to the emperor and were granted noble rank on their accession to high office. They had no independent base of power. Ministers had short tenures and a number of them were executed.

His officials made cruel exactions of taxes and labor from the people, particularly the local elites of the eastern provinces who might oppose him. Large numbers of persons were deported to the area of the capital. The purpose, according to a memorial of 96 B.C., was to strengthen the area around the capital and to eliminate vicious and unruly exterior elements. By these means Wu Ti extended his power to the local level, where the local elites had never before been challenged. In so doing he opened up advancement in government service to the humblest persons, some of whom started out as county clerks and came to be court secretaries serving the emperor personally.

In achieving his autocratic position, Wu Ti showed a keen appreciation for the nature of power, the character of governmental bureaucracy, and, above all, a shrewd insight into the manipulation of public opinion for his own purposes. Yet even within this autocratic framework, direct power was limited to those areas where the emperor could turn his attention. Clerks and private secretaries gained considerable power through their selection of the documents that would reach the emperor. The most powerful of these men was the chief secretary, who controlled the flow of information, drew up the agenda, and made appointments. He could block, impede, or expedite any matter simply by withholding it or bringing it to the imperial attention. Though power in name still resided in the ministers, real power rested in the imperial chancery. In Wu Ti's government the man you saw first was not always the one who did things. If a man was content with real instead of nominal power, the backroom was right for him. This seems to be the normal process of government with strong men, who arrogate to themselves power commensurate with their responsibilities. Two centuries later the government of Augustus Caesar was to be described as one by imperial secretaries. And just as Wu Ti wrapped his consolida-

tion of power in the shroud of an ancient and venerated teaching, which he interpreted as the justification for his actions, so did Augustus deliberately conceal his absolute authority behind the myth of a reconstituted Roman Republic.

ADMINISTRATION

The administrative system developed during and after the reign of Wu Ti can be called a bureaucracy for the sake of convenience, but the term needs qualification. "Bureaucracy" is often, as is the case with "feudalism," used only in a derogatory sense. Yet it is that system by which any large-scale organization maintains its efficiency and its corporate sanity, dividing the work up in such a way that it can be done by specialized personnel. A bureaucratic system entails standard procedures, centralized authority, and corporate responsibility. The whole organization and not any individual gets the work done. A professional organization, as opposed to a bureaucratic organization, places the total responsibility on the individual.

These two techniques of getting work done conflict. In Han China they came to be reconciled. The imperial government selected for its bureaucracy those people who met its corporate prerequisites, and then put heavy professional demands on them. That is, administrative officials were given a wide latitude to permit the most efficient functioning. It was in the early Han period that the Chinese began to reconcile the conflicting demands in government of personal commitment, institutional solidarity, and occupational creativity, and this reconciliation is the chief glory of that syncretism of ideas and action called Confucianism. It is not until centuries later in the T'ang period that it becomes institutionalized. But it is visible in Early Han. Of course government service in the time of Wu Ti was still very personal, for the emperor selected those men who were to serve him, and loyalty was owed to him alone. It was only gradually, after centuries, that appointments came to follow a fixed course and the norms for service were established.

The Chinese administrators did have interests, which at times rose above their loyalty to either the emperor or the state. They were all part of the powerful landowning class. Whether

they came from the hereditary nobility (the dominant part of the ruling class until the ninth century A.D.) or from powerful landed families, or were individuals of great distinction they drew their wealth from the land and paid little if any taxes. And in matters of taxes and the land economy, their corporate loyalty was to themselves.

GOVERNMENT

At the apex of its power the Han government was rather simple in structure. The entire country was divided into provinces, which were further divided into counties and districts. In addition there were "kingdoms," areas under the dominion of sons of the emperor. Following the revolt of 154 B.C., powerful independent fiefs no longer existed.

An imperial steward was placed in each fief as watchdog and controller, and as rapidly as the hereditary rulers died these fiefs were absorbed into the general civil administration. By Wu Ti's time there were no longer the autonomous states of the Han confederation of Kao-tsu, and the tendency of localities to move out of the orbit of the central Chinese power was counteracted by increasing centralism, acculturation, efficient civil administration, military garrisons, and the theocratic position of the emperor. The total estimated population of almost sixty million people was controlled and administered by perhaps one hundred thousand civil officials, a remarkably small number when one realizes that Han China was greater in size than the Roman Empire and much more difficult for travel and communication.

At the head of government came the emperor, more than a mere human and less than a god. The ancient Chinese believed that the benefactors of mankind should be worshiped, as did the Greeks and the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. This becomes clear when one realizes how many Hellenistic rulers had the titles of "Savior" or "Revealed" and that since the times of Julius Caesar Roman rulers were posthumously accorded divine honors and occasionally were venerated when alive. The sacred powers of the Son of Heaven applied to the dead as well as the living, for he could promote or demote deities. In Early Han the emperor, by sacrificing to the various gods of every region of his realm, marked himself as the universal intercessor. On the more

practical side, by including all beliefs in the Chinese pantheon, he symbolized the unity of the state.

The sacral nature of the emperor was fully accepted and understood as a great binding force in China. It was his moral and cosmological authority that vested such enormous power in the imperial office. Since the ultimate purpose of government in China was, in conjunction with the natural law, moral, then there was no aspect of Chinese life in which the imperial government did not play some part. Nowhere is the operation of this moral purpose and sacral force more evidenced than in the villages. Han China was a land of villages, which fared with a minimum of supervision from a minimum of officials. Life in the villages was regulated to accord with Heaven and Earth, abiding by moral principles that dated from ancient times. This is a mark of sacred or semi-sacred monarchies, all of which operated on a theocratic basis—and without a police force. It is cause for reflection that this kind of governance was the longest-lived form of state in history.

The emperor had little wealth comparable to the great personal investments and property holdings of modern royal families, but this was amply balanced by his ability to draw as he wished on the total resources of China. Material wealth was, after all, of minor importance to the person who was the fountain of all power, honors, privilege, and office; the maker of laws and the court of last appeal; the recipient of all taxes and services; and the dispenser of life and death. While in theory the only limit to his power was Heaven's judgment, in practice the emperor delegated a good deal of power, particularly to a civil and military bureaucracy whose top layer consisted of the great secretaries and ministers of state.

His right hand was the chancellor and his left hand was the imperial secretary. The chancellor administered the civil and military bureaus, had authority to make recommendations and appointments, and was in effect chief assistant to the throne. The imperial secretary was chief personnel officer for the throne, with powers to inspect, admonish, and punish. He was the main channel for memorials and papers of state, and at times, through his control of the secretariat, he was the greatest power in China. There were originally nine ministers of state, five of whom were

directly concerned with managing the interests and affairs of the emperor, the palace, the imperial clan, the army of palace attendants, the court ritual, and the imperial purse. The chancellor, the imperial secretary, and the ministers formed a sort of cabinet in which, in camera, there was open debate with the members free to disagree with the emperor. Quite frequently the emperor turned from his cabinet to seek advice and support from personal friends, relatives, or men of great reputation and integrity. The central government administered the capital city and the provinces and appointed all officers of state except the village elders, who administered strictly local affairs and were left alone so long as the locality paid its taxes, kept the peace, and observed the laws.

All the appointed officials, from the chancellor to the most insignificant magistrate, held his post at the pleasure of his superior officer. Since any official could be dismissed or demoted for whimsical as well as serious reasons, there was little security of tenure in China. Posts, preferments, and honors could be purchased, and indeed the sale of rank was a welcome addition to Wu Ti's treasury. Every official grade had an annual salary calculated in measures of grain and paid in grain or gold or both. These salaries were inadequate for all save wealthy officials, and the average Chinese official had to "feed" on his post—that is, solicit money and gifts from those he administered as well as from his official inferiors. Posts were not hard to come by for the well born, the well connected, or the scholar of distinction, and indeed the lower ranks of the Han titular nobility were not difficult to purchase. But despite this penumbra of corruption, under optimum conditions, the higher posts in the land went only to those who were imperial relations or to those of long-proven ability, while the highest titles of nobility—especially the enfeoffed three ranks at the top—went only to those of imperial blood or high in imperial favor and to men of enormous achievements.

THE LAW

This officialdom was closely supervised throughout China. The Ch'in police supervision of officials was revived in 106 B.C. as an inspectorate general with practically unlimited power to check

officialdom for honesty, competence, loyalty, and discipline, and these watchdogs could admonish the emperor himself for misconduct. (Unlike certain modern Western systems of inspection and of "grievance officers" who operate to protect the citizen against the government, the Chinese censorship operated to protect the government against its own officers.) From the gathering of high officials who advised the emperor (the court conference), certain men universally respected for knowledge and probity of conduct were chosen censors. The occasionally dishonest censor (and they were as ill paid as the rest of Chinese officialdom) could pursue private vengeance against even the highest officials, for they had enormous latitude in making charges and impeaching. The watchdogs themselves became watched when Wu Ti set up the office of superintendent of security, and the censors and the new security men watched each other.

China was too far-flung to permit this kind of supervision over village officials, who, after all, were not chosen from the capital. The villages were controlled by the five-family system of mutual responsibility. In 121 B.C. the savage legal principle was put into effect that anyone with a knowledge of a crime who failed to report it was an accessory to that crime. This was largely directed against criminally careless or dishonest officials. As for a general criminal code, to the best of our knowledge (for the Han codes are lost) there was an extensive and severe law applied by imperial officers. There were no judges as such.

Harsh punishments called for torture, mutilation, excruciatingly slow executions, and the legal extermination of entire families. More than six hundred crimes were punishable by death, and almost any misdemeanor could be punished by penal servitude. The scope and rigor of this system make it difficult to distinguish it from the hated Legalism of Ch'in. But one fundamental distinction can be made. Ch'in law was amoral and was applied equally. Indeed, the Ch'in epoch seems to have been the only time in the history of China when the law was applied evenhandedly to all men, disregarding the injunction of the *Shu Ching* that "virtue has no invariable rule but fixes on that which is good as its law." It comprehended all spheres and was independent of all but the will of the lawgiver.

The Han law was not as comprehensive as the Ch'in law, was not amoral, and was not regarded as being simply the will of the lawgiver. Rather it seems to have been viewed as the agency of a higher law and to be used by the state in the perpetuation of moral conduct. This conduct accorded with Heaven. Heaven and Earth were worlds parallel in time and closely affecting each other. Therefore the Chinese believed, as did the Greeks, that "he who does not perform his appointed duty may appear as a violator of the whole order of the universe." The emperor and his ministers responsible for maintaining the order of the universe according to the will of Heaven knew what was good for their subjects and had the duty of educating and training them. This could be done only if the bad and the recalcitrant were put aside so as not to contaminate the rest. This was to be done through legal compulsion, not as it was done in Ch'in but in the service of right conduct. But the state could not depend upon legal force, on positive law alone, which was regarded as a transgression by the emperor against the will of Heaven.

The curse of the law was that it could treat minor infractions of morality as criminal acts, subject to severe punishment. Furthermore, Han law was not evenly applied. One could commute penalties by fines, and reductions and redemptions were often to be had. The highly placed were exempt from shameful and degrading punishments, and since high places could be bought, aristocratic rank was a good, although not infallible or permanent, insurance against the law. Exemption of the elite was based on the common-sense premise that a ruler should protect those on whom he depended.

> If the Ruler Above treats his ministers as he would treat horses or dogs, they will of course act like horses or dogs; if he treats them like government convicts (laborers) they will naturally act like convicts. . . . So the reason why anciently the Rules of Ceremonious Behavior did not extend to commoners and why the mutilating punishments were not applied to the Grandees was in order to stimulate the virtuous behavior of the favored ministers.*

Cases at law for this favored group were decided by analogy with cases in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, on the ground that an

* A. F. P. Hulswe, *Remnants of Han Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), p. 288.

educated man should be judged by rules different from those used to judge common people.

The structure of the Han government we have seen. What it meant to its subjects was something else again. From ancient times tradition had taught the average Chinese to regard politics as a thing apart, often a dangerous activity, to which his personal criteria did not apply. This led to the imbalance, characteristic of Han times, between a large apolitical population and a small, very active political elite. Among China's population in general there was almost a total lack of desire to be close to or to participate in government. Family and kin ties no less than the immemorial class relationships, sanctioned by use and doctrine, created the ideal of mutual dependence. One did favors for others within one's group and expected favors in return.

The imperial government did only that which the local governments were not able to do. It built and maintained dams, dikes, canals, roads, and post stations, collected, stored, or distributed public monies, built and maintained public buildings and fortifications, operated arsenals, and engrossed certain kinds of commerce and trade. It touched on the life of all society solely through the inculcation of moral conduct and through the imposition of taxes and massive forced labor.

In time private intrigues within the imperial palace became an increasingly decisive influence on public affairs. Slowly power had flooded into the hands of those who had direct access to the imperial person—that is, intimate friends, relatives, eunuchs—and as time passed, into the hands of the family of the consort. Since it was the practice to give male members of the emperor's family important regional posts, high offices at the court itself had to be filled with persons of nearly equivalent status, which meant the consort family. This custom, coupled with the growing concentration of power within the imperial precincts, intensified inter- and intra-family disputes and helped in time to bring the downfall of the Han dynasty. In pressing toward its state and imperial objectives, this quasi-secret power bloc, which demanded much of the people in labor and taxes, kept the prisons full, issued terrible punishments for dissent, and poked into every aspect of life, came terribly close to the detested Ch'in model. It seems to represent the delayed if altered triumph of Legalism.

Yet the social system remained stable. There was a marked increase in the study of the Classics and Confucian teachings, even though Confucianists themselves had to share authority. Nowhere else is the remarkable adaptability for survival of Confucianism so well seen as in this period. Its social sanctions, which were the real engine of its existence, remained unimpaired.These men could point with pride to numbers of administrators appointed from among those learned in the old texts and traditions. In fact, this group constituted such a large number of officials that they remained as a limiting force against the revival of Ch'in absolutism.

Han Wu Ti in his thirst for power and immortality was the apotheosis of the First Emperor. He broke China financially and drained it of manpower, but he failed to drive the country to that desperation that marked the downfall of Ch'in. There was present always the restraining hand of tradition applied by the scholars, and always the last-minute measure applied by officials, not so much because of humane instincts but because of an awareness that the unchecked personal power of one man menaced the entire governing group.

After the military and financial excesses of Wu Ti had driven the country to near collapse, Ho-kuang, whom Wu Ti appointed to be regent to his youngest son and heir, Chao, faithfully and reliably continued Wu Ti's style of government without its excesses. He held the position of commander in chief as well as that of master of writing. Faced with the impoverishment of the country, he embarked on a series of sweeping economic reforms, granting loans to poor peasants, remitting taxes in years of poor harvests, and putting a stop to forced contributions. In this way he laid the foundation for the economic recovery of the empire.

Chao died young and Liu-ho, a grandson of Wu Ti, was selected to become emperor, but he comported himself so scandalously during the period of mourning that he outraged the court. Ho-kuang summoned the high officials of the empire and explained the gravity of the situation to them. He pointed out a precedent in the distant past when Yin, chief minister of the founder of the Shang dynasty, had removed an unworthy heir, and proposed the same course of action. The officials assented

and the emperor was removed, on the grounds that he was morally unfit and that he had not received the Mandate of Heaven. As his successor, the high ministers selected Liu Ping-yi, who became Emperor Hsüan. Ho-kuang resigned upon the accession of the new emperor but was reappointed and continued the actual rule until his death in 68 B.C.

The young Emperor Hsüan turned out to be an amiable and decent man who, under the careful supervision of his administrators, had a laudable reign. Yet the habit of palace intrigue set in motion by Wu Ti was too deep a stain to wash out. While a nominal Confucianism became the orthodoxy of Chinese government, the fact is that after Hsüan the great determinants of power were the clerks, eunuchs, and great families of China.

It should also be noted that Confucianism, with its insistence on a network of family loyalties, approved and even encouraged the award of high office to relatives. Wu Ti had avoided this, but no succeeding monarch was powerful enough to do the same. It was the third successor to Han Wu Ti, the feeble-minded Emperor Yüan, who first demonstrated the truism that an autocracy needs an autocrat. The personal deterioration of imperial power that began with him continued throughout the reign of Cheng (33–7 B.C.), who allowed his mother's family, the Wangs, to virtually run the empire. His officials were corrupt men, by and large, and under his reign, when Confucianism was supreme, there was great misery for the people. Cheng left no heirs, having murdered his infant natural sons to placate a beautiful favorite who had failed to produce male children by him.

Within eighty years of the death of Han Wu Ti, the whole country and empire were in desperate economic and political condition.

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The Pattern of Ideology

THE MOLDING OF THE DOCTRINE

Wu Ti was a highly superstitious autocrat contemptuous of the rational thinking and anti-authoritarian ideas of Confucianists. Yet while he ruled, Confucian schools gained a firm hold on education and thus on the mind of China (at least the mind of officialdom), and it was the period in which the Confucianists deprived their doctrinal enemies of favor and power. Their greatest asset was a body of respected knowledge that could be adapted to Wu Ti's imperial pragmatism and authoritarianism, just as it could have been adapted to constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, or nearly any other form of government. This adaptability offered to any Chinese ruler the mastery of dynastic endurance.

Confucianism was not a rigid orthodoxy but a reasonably flexible doctrine whose ability to modify to power made it a channel for those who wanted to rise. It was to become the rationale for the status of the educated class and a final check on the use of despotism in China. Its dominance made politics a reflex of ideology, so that by the Late Han period China was as much governed by control over what men studied and learned as by law and administrative institutions. Traditional China looked like

a state but it was not really one in the modern sense. It was a world society, and the nature and function of the ideological controls of this society will be insistently repeated in this book.

THE SWINEHERD AND THE SCHOLAR

Wu Ti is a superb example of the non-Confucian operating within Confucianism. Despite the swelling importance of Confucianism in his time, he lived and acted pretty much as had the First Emperor. He was an occultist fascinated with thaumaturges, diviners, emanations, and sorcerers. He built his marvelous sprawl of the Chin Chang palace on the plans of his magicians, so that in the midst of a magically determined architectural splendor he could seek immortality.

Yet under Emperor Wu the Confucianists gained the mastery of their ideological opponents. Wu had had, after all, a classical education, and though disposed to rule in his own style, he liked the ceremonials and rites of Confucianists. Moreover, he was shrewd enough to try to capture the social prestige and intellectual labor of the Confucianists while putting aside everything else they had to offer. So in 141 B.C. it proved not too difficult to get him to dismiss from the Board of Erudites (the official agency for the care and transmission of the ancient learning) all non-Confucianists. When five years later the board was re-formed (the immediate implementation of the edict having been blocked by the dowager empress, who was inclined toward the Taoists), the Confucianists enjoyed a complete monoply of the membership. They formed the board into five committees, each of which was charged with the study and explication of one of the five Classics. From this beginning the imperial secretary Kung-sun Hung, who was disturbed by the neglect of Confucian teachings, succeeded in establishing an imperial school at Chang-an. There the board could teach fifty selected disciples, from which the best students were selected for government posts after a year. Kung-sun Hung was a shrewd and learned man who had risen from poverty, some said from being a swineherd, to a position of eminence. His skill at flattery was as effective as his skill at letters.

The imperial university, by the second century A.D., had thousands of students, and when considered with its regional

and provincial branches, there can be little wonder that the classical learning came to dominate the Chinese mind. The first great victory for this learning and for the Confucianists occurred earlier with the edict by Wu Ti that any *suitable* student who had passed the examination in the Classics was eligible for an official post. This practice eliminated the peasantry and permitted the domination of Chinese administration by scholars, for naturally "suitable" men came from the families and cliques of officials. The scheme is attributed to the scholar Tung Chung-shu. Tung was a universalist, an eclectic, a man determined to link practice with doctrine, and to make his own qualifications the mirror for administrators. His awesome reputation as a scholar and the appeal of his own syncretic brand of Confucianism permitted him to bring into the Classics not only chunks of Legalism and Taoism, but also a great deal of popular superstitions, all of which he welded into an acceptable theory of state and society.

His doctrine was called the Science of Catastrophes and Anomalies. It holds, quite simply, that the secular order is right as long as it reflects the will of Heaven, for Heaven can never be wrong; the secular order is wrong when it does not reflect the will of Heaven, and this is known because then Heaven through nature visits menacing omens on the reign. This might be likened to the old Hebrew prophetic concept of the covenant between God and his people: God had chosen his people to show all mankind how to live in righteousness. As long as they practiced his will, they were preserved in peace and prosperity. When the covenant was breached, God visited his wrath on the people. In the more sophisticated Confucian analogy, Heaven uses nature to punish man for the transgressions of the ruler, who is the sole human agent to this contract. "The King is but the executor of Heaven."

Of course, Tung's doctrine was a metaphysical rationalization of the status quo, but it was not a particularly selfish rationalization. The men of Tung's class well understood that their own welfare depended, to a large extent, upon the general welfare of Chinese society, which in turn depended upon stabilizing every component of Chinese society up to and including the emperor.

Tung's teachings acted as a restraint on a would-be despot,

since the elite could pass blame to the very top by invoking the portents of nature. The portents were also used as political weapons to undermine ideological opponents. However, Tung's doctrine was primarily a means of judging the moral effectiveness of government, and to view that doctrine merely as a facile attempt to gain power is to fail to understand the attempt of Han thinkers to construct an orderly picture of nature. The Confucian philosopher Hsün-tzu had theorized that man and his government formed a triad with Heaven and its seasons and Earth and its riches. Combined with the cosmological speculations of the naturalists of the Yin-Yang and five elements schools, this produced a comprehensive theory, which correctly applied, rationalized the failures of man's government when they were manifest in natural phenomena.

CONFUCIAN SOCIETY

A jurisdiction so vague and yet so arbitrary was, of course, exposed to great abuse. The substance as well as the form of justice was sacrificed to the prejudices of the righteous as well as to special interests. But the emperor's conduct was guided by the remonstrances of his ministers and, if he was wise, by his own self-interest. What Gibbon said of the Roman emperors could apply to the Chinese:

> Wise or fortunate is the prince who connects his own reputation with the honor or interest of a perpetual order of man. . . . [The monarch] is already master of the lives and fortunes of his subjects, and those who have incurred his displeasure are already numbered among the dead . . . virtue or even reason will suggest to his impartial mind that he is the guardian of peace and equity, and the interests of society are inseparably connected with his own.*

Chinese emperors well understood that their system rested not only on the moral sanctions of the past but also on the imperial accommodation to the present. Translated into the most practical terms, this meant that a sensible emperor was less concerned with

* E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: John Murray, 1903), Vol. IV, pp. 258–270.

fanciful analogies from an unknown past, devised by his intellectural bureaucrats, than he was with dangerous popular attitudes. Insofar as popular thought was conditioned by its adherence to Confucianist tradition, his position was protected, but nevertheless he was expected to guard the reasonable interests of all classes of Chinese society.

In China, what succeeded and endured was its harmonious, hierarchal structure of society. This was a structure where class distinctions were clear-cut and accepted, where the unequal man was taken for granted. One's status was determined by the kind of work one did. The greatest respect was reserved for those, such as officials and scholars, who did mental work. Being superior, they were accorded by law a superior standard of living. Officials were the greatest consumers and spenders. Wealth alone was an insufficient claim on privilege. Even stupendously rich merchants, who performed essentially physical labor, were ranked beneath officials and scholars.

Yet this Confucian society was not a two-class division of rulers and ruled. Formally Chinese society was divided into rulers (the imperial family, ministers of state, officials, and scholars) and subjects (scholars not holding office, farmers, artisans, merchants, and unclassified people who cut across classes), but there were many sub-categories in all classes.

Despite the fact that society appeared rigid, a man could climb rapidly from obscurity to fame or fortune and be as rapidly degraded. Chang-an was a lively capital of men on the way up or down. It had millionaires, a gangster underworld, out-of-work scholars, a thousand unsuccessful candidates for office, wealthy artisans, degraded officials, dispossessed nobility, prosperous farmers—all of the familiar elements of the active society whose stability lay not in practice but in doctrine. The order of this society was far older than the Han dynasty, but the public philosophy was worked out by the scholars of Early Han who, in seeking that metaphysical legitimization of the secular order that Confucius had avoided, gave China the *sine qua non* of the imperial state. From that time on Chinese man could conceive of no political idea that did not assume the complete identification of state and society, and the basic directing force was the sov-

ereign consensus of Confucianists opinion. Of all the ways of thought that struggled in China, Confucianism was the most practical, the least concerned with absolutes, the most palatable to the Chinese distaste for extremes, the most lacking in the itch for reform or revolution.

THE OFFICIAL LEARNING

"As early as the second century B.C. the classical language had already become unintelligible to the people . . . in order to meet this most serious difficulty the government hit upon a system under which public office was conferred upon those who had studied the classic writings."* When, in 196 B.C., Kao-tsu had called upon his vassals to send him incorruptible, diligent men to help in government, there was neither a recognized body of classical writings nor were there written examinations for office. Men came to office through the recommendation of officials, the summons of the emperor himself, the use of good connections (considered a rather indelicate and unworthy path to office), and the purchase of rank.

Textual knowledge as a base for office holding depended upon education, and both Kung-sun Hung and Tung Chung-shu had proposed that educational institutions be established—the one on the grounds that it would make for a more perfect order ("the former rulers did not combine government and education and did not perfect the social order"); and the other on the grounds that "the University is the central source of competent scholars and the fundamental source of culture as well." Thus the university was established. The *Han History* says that in the year 22 B.C. it was the center of Confucian scholars and a source of officials for the whole land. A written examination was not standard until 132 A.D., the date that could be taken to arbitrarily mark the time when Confucianism became official, although, as we have seen, the political and intellectual history of the preceding two centuries was Confucianist. With the establishment of an official school the problem arose of what was orthodox to teach.

* F. Galt, *A History of Chinese Educational Institutions* (London: Probsthain, 1951), Vol. I, p. 203.

In former Han most teachers taught from copies of the Classics that they owned, and we do not know how variant they were. The original texts had already been lost, and Han scholars knew neither who the real authors were or who had compiled the texts at hand. Nevertheless, from these later variants official texts were determined that served until 1905 as the base of the curriculum and of Chinese education. A vast knowledge of these classics and commentaries upon them was thought necessary to enter the only occupation deemed fit for a gentleman.

The catalogue of the library, to which all surviving works and volumes were sent, lists over thirteen thousand items. From these the Han Confucianists singled out as the arbiters of orthodoxy four separate ancient works. They had to be holistic about these works not merely to prove their views on antiquity but to provide a comprehensive and uniform guide that could easily be referred to. Once their work of official exegesis was completed and they had eliminated the discrepancies in the texts, they felt that in these four volumes they had a good and complete design for every eventuality.

The selection of texts was accompanied by arguments among Han scholars on the authenticity of writings that had survived from Ch'in and pre-Ch'in times. The First Emperor and Li Ssu had, by fiat, declared a new and simple script to replace the many regional forms of writing in China. This was more than an advance in calligraphy. It involved changes in phonetics and in meanings and was a radical departure in written language. The Classics and many other texts were rewritten in this new script. By the time of Wu Ti, the dominant school was the New Text school (led by Tung Chung-shu), which endorsed the supposedly rediscovered old texts re-edited and rewritten in the new script. In opposition to this school was the Old School, a lesser group viewed as heterodox, which endorsed pre-Han texts. There was great debate between New School and Old School.

For the first two centuries of the Han dynasty, the debate over the writings was waged. The New Text adherents accused the Old Text adherents of perpetuating a completely hypothetical antiquity and of transmitting that which was false and meaningless. The Old Text adherents put forth a position that the classic

texts were in reality a valuable mine of the words and deeds of the Chinese past that had been digested and set down by very wise men, and that the present age could, through critical study, draw valuable lessons from these works. The New School claimed that aside from being a source of wisdom Confucius was more than human and that he had revealed a new order of things. They accepted as akin to revelation not only their versions of the canon but even apocrypha, which they themselves had largely composed. The New School was attempting to create a system from inconsistent fragments and to establish doctrine about men and events that the pre-Han texts treat only in passing.

The debate reached heights similar to the heretical convulsions of early Christianity, and it became obvious that imperial arbitration would be necessary. In 54 B.C. the emperor convened a council of twenty-two leading scholars. These men met over a period of three years before rendering a decision, and that decision was on only one of the points at debate.

The continuing bitterness after the conclave of 54–51 B.C. threatened, among other things, to make the Classics unintelligible to students, and in 70 A.D. another learned conference was called. This, known as the conference of the White Tiger Hall (our detailed knowledge of it comes from a fourteenth-century text), was a victory for the New Text school, the differences being resolved in their favor. But this was their high-water mark. In the next two centuries the studies of remarkable scholars such as Liu-hsin, Wang Ch'ung, and Cheng-hsuan were to point out ruthlessly the forgeries and errors of the New School texts. Very slowly the supernatural aspects were squeezed out of official Confucianism and many of the credulities of Early Han scholarship erased. By the third century the Science of Catastrophes and Anomalies was shattered by the discovery that the regularity of such events as eclipses disproved any interconnection between natural portents and government. This news had little effect on the popular veneration of Confucius, for between the second and sixth centuries A.D. Confucianism became a widespread cult with shrines and a regular code of ritual. However, the literati turned for spiritual consolation to Taoism or to the new foreign religion, Buddhism.

[14]

The Pattern of the Empire

During the decades of reconstruction, the Chinese were increasingly aware of a new and dangerous menace on their northern and western frontiers—their old enemies, the horse peoples of the plains beyond the settled zone of the Yellow River. With the rise of Ch'in and the unification of China, the pressures from these raiders intensified as though the increase in Chinese power were producing its reciprocal of power. The building of the Wall had catalyzed on its barbarian side a nomadic federation, whose maraudings during the Early Han period fill the imperial histories. The government of Kao-tsu had tacitly ceded everything north of the "Long Wall" to these barbarians, the "Nation of the Archers," in an effort to placate them until the new dynasty stabilized itself (which it was not able to do until the victory of 154 B.C. over its internal enemies). Despite the concessions made to them, the nomads continued their accustomed round of pillage and murder across the Wall.

THE NORTH AND WEST

At the beginning of the reign of Han Wu Ti, the area from the Wall to the Siberian forests and from the Mongol plateau to the steppes and deserts of Central Asia was under the domina-

L. Baikal
L. Balkhash
Kokand
SOGDIANA
Ili R.
BACTRIA
T'ien-shan Range
Kashgar
Tarim R.
Turfan
Urga
MONGOLIA
Gobi Desert
SUIYUAN
Liao R.
MANCHURIA
Yalu R.
Pyongyang
SINKIANG
Pamirs Range
Taklamakan Desert
Tun-huang
Ordos Desert
NINGSIA
KANSU
SHANTUNG
SHENSI
Han R.
HUPEI
SZECHUAN
CHEKIANG
HUNAN
KWEICHOW
Siang R.
Kan R.
MIN YUEH
FUKIEN
KWANGSI
KWANGTUNG
YUNNAN
TONKIN
ANNAM
THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN
OF THE CHINESE STATE AND EMPIRE
Approximate boundaries of the Han Empire

tion of a loose nomad confederation, the Hsiung-nu. These tribes lived in an area of harsh climate where only the tough and adaptable could survive. Living with their horses and sheep herds, and needing water and forage for their animals, the great families and tribes fought each other for the limited grazing lands. Drought or a brutal winter could destroy an entire tribe, and the survivors turned to raiding the sedentary farmers of the south. Their needs made the plainsmen predators. While normally their social structure was made up of scattered family units, occasionally a leader appeared among them who could mold the various units into a formidable war machine. This led to the rise of those fearful war federations of the "Barbarians of the West." The periodic exhaustion and collapse of China's economic and political machinery, so much a mark of Chinese civilization, stemmed not so much from economic or political malformation, assumed in theory to be peculiar to China, but from the remorseless ravages of war.

A significant illustration of this can be seen in the first and second centuries B.C. Until the reign of Han Wu Ti, the Hsiung-nu, often using Chinese rebels and military technicians, raided pretty much as they pleased, even as far as the environs of the capital, Chang-an. The Wall was not proof against attack in force. The Chinese, on the defensive, fought as well as they could, but more often bought off the raiders. Gifts and tribute-paying started in 200 B.C., when Kao-tsu, trapped by nomad forces, ransomed himself. Embassies and presents were sent to the "Great Captain" of the nomads. Ranking officers were given titles and good livings if they changed sides, and others were attracted by high pay into a mercenary cavalry division. But these expensive and often humiliating strategies did not buy safety. The Hsiung-nu federation, which dominated western Manchuria, eastern Mongolia and the "Western Regions" (that is, roughly, modern Sinkiang) could only be dispersed and rendered harmless by war.

The great Chinese wars against this federation began in 133 B.C. with an unsuccessful raid deep into enemy territory. By 129 B.C. Wu Ti had regrouped his forces, and during the next decade seven great campaigns were fought in the north and the west that secured the lands inside the Wall and facilitated Chinese

expansion into the route that leads from the hills of Kansu to Turkestan. (In modern terms the campaigns secured southern Suiyuan, eastern Kansu, Ningsia, and the route that leads to the basin of the Tarim River and through the oasis kingdoms of Central Asia.) The raids of 129 and 128 B.C. were preparatory to the conquest, in 127 B.C., of the Ordos plateau, that land within the great bend of the Yellow River, settled by one hundred thousand Chinese colonists. Three years later another one hundred thousand colonists were sent after the armies to take possession of the region northwest of the Wall, which protected the flank of the route through Kansu. In 121 B.C. western Kansu was occupied, and in 119 B.C. an enormous Chinese force broke across the Gobi region as far as Lake Baikal. This strike across the desert and into the outer Mongol steppe was undertaken partly to punish and scatter the Hsiung-nu. The main objective, however, of all the campaigns westward through Kansu was to seize the oasis of the Tarim basin and to open and secure the road to Europe, the "Western Regions," which Wu Ti had learned was a land of wealth.

When Wu Ti first planned his strategy against the Hsiung-nu, it seemed advisable to attempt to encircle the enemy by seeking a military alliance with a great tribe lying west of them and unfriendly to them. These people, the Yüeh-chih, who occupied Kansu, had been driven westward from their homeland in 175 B.C., and by 130 B.C. had settled on the Amu Darya River and taken over Sogdiana, a former satrapy of Alexander the Great. Two years later they took the region to the south of the Amu Darya called Bactria. Although the Yüeh-chih people had known and dealt with the Chinese for centuries, Wu Ti was uncertain of their location. In 138 B.C. he sent an embassy to them under Chang-ch'ien. Shortly after leaving the Chinese frontiers, Chang-ch'ien was taken captive by the Hsiung-nu and was held prisoner for ten years. He escaped and continued west on his mission. On his return he was again captured by Hsiung-nu, again escaped, and arrived in Chang-an in 126 B.C., at a time when Chinese armies held the Ordos. He was the first Chinese to report on western Asia, bringing Wu Ti valuable intelligence on the Central Asian kingdoms of Balkh, Samarkand, and Bokhara, and

sketchy information on Egypt, Parthia, Media, and Babylonia, as well as news of a route to India that led through Szechuan, Yunnan, and Burma. He carried with him grape and alfalfa cuttings, the beginning of a long exchange of plants which, during the next centuries, saw chives, cucumbers, sesame, walnuts, and pomegranates come into China from Persia and Central Asia, while the peach, pear, orange, rose, peony, azalea, camellia, and chrysanthemum started their journeys to the West.

What appealed most to the emperor was Chang-ch'ien's story of the great horses of Ferghana. The war against the Hsiung-nu was a cavalry war, and to win it the Chinese needed to remodel their cavalry; they needed prodigious numbers of horses, and they needed a better animal than the small steppe pony. As early as 140 B.C. a chain of breeding stations existed on the frontiers from which tens of thousands of horses were brought to winter and to fatten at Chang-an. The demands of war made the breeding of horses a substantial business over all China. The horses China needed were raised on the stud farms of Bactria and Ferghana. To get these horses and to secure the profitable trade routes to the West, the emperor began what was to become a twenty-five-year campaign for control of the Tarim River area. This river, well populated along its thousand mile course, was the main route westward, and Kashgar was the focus of all caravans passing between the Pamirs and the T'ien-shan. The route was relatively free from nomads, who, for the sake of forage, moved east and west between the T'ien-shan and the Altai. In 108 B.C. Lou-lan was taken, which gave China control of the Turfan oasis area. The campaigns of 106 and 105 B.C. against Ferghana failed, but in 102 Wu Ti struck in force. The following year Ferghana was taken. China was now mistress of the Tarim basin and of that route from Kansu to Central Asia along which Buddhism was to pass into China and silk outward to the markets of Rome. But Han control was still not absolute. In 104 and again in 91 B.C. the Hsiung-nu forced back Chinese armies, but in 78 B.C., wearied and diminished by a quarter-century of fighting, the tribes turned west to the grazing lands north of the T'ien-shan range, where they remained a threat, for they pastured within striking distance of the Silk Road. Wu Ti's grandson, Emperor Hsüan (73-49 B.C.),

continued the wars of attrition. In his time Turfan, the pivot of all Chinese Central Asia, was occupied by the Chinese, and after a political split within the Hsiung-nu forces, one of the leading chiefs became a Chinese vassal. The remainder of the Hsiung-nu then moved westward to Lake Balkhash. In 35 B.C. they were sought out and smashed by a Chinese army. The remnants began the regrouping and slow westward movement that several centuries later brought them into Europe under command of the house of Attila.

Nomad power was broken over the decades by greater Chinese manpower, the military colonization of conquered areas, the Chinese adoption of nomad cavalry tactics, improved by using horses bred in Central Asia, the ability of a central government to keep a nation almost constantly mobilized for war, and, perhaps most important of all, the use of a superior weapon, the crossbow. The crossbow is Chinese in origin and features a mechanism, a triple compound lever, that was kept a state secret. It is mentioned in Chou texts, and was widely used in the Chinese armies long before the Romans used it in the West. It was the standard offensive weapon of the Han armies. (Fifteen hundred years later the Chinese developed the repeating crossbow, which shot off its magazine of twenty arrows in pairs within thirty seconds.)

Manpower for the Han armies came from a militia system adapted from the Ch'in dynasty, which the Ch'in in turn had developed from the older feudal labor and military services of Chou. In Chou times a man had to give three days of service, a year on the frontiers, and one month a year for three successive years to home military duty. Ch'in stepped up the demands of the system, reported to be "thirtyfold those of Chou," and Han moderated it. In Early Han every male aged twenty who met the requirements of health and height was inscribed for the public service. Beginning at the age of twenty-three these men served one month every year for three years in their home areas. The fourth year they served for a month at the capital, and the fifth year they served again in their home areas. They were then free of the annual obligation but were still liable to military call up to the age of fifty-six. Mandatory service on the frontier required

three days a year for labor or one full year for garrison duty. Few farmers could spend an entire year away from their fields, and fewer could afford the impractical trip to the frontiers for three days of service. In these cases the government permitted a cash commutation of this service. The far-flung border garrisons, which had to be both permanent and professional, consisted chiefly of mercenaries paid from the fees of those who were commuting their service. Large numbers of men drew their livelihood by serving out the duties of others, and a large part of the army consisted of men in penal servitude. The entire length of the Wall (extended 121–108 B.C. to defend the Kansu corridor) had to be garrisoned, and hundreds of thousands of Chinese colonized the new areas. Tens of thousands labored to move supplies and equipment to the line of the Wall and to the "Western Regions" (the western extremity of the Wall was eventually abandoned due to the prohibitive cost of supplying it from East China), and many thousands more formed the mobile armies in Central Asia. A full generation of Chinese paid in life and labor for the defeat of the nomads and the acquisition of the "Western Regions," and the cost of maintaining an army had, by 127 B.C., bankrupted the government.

THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST

The empire to the north and the west represented a dead loss to the state, for the greatest export, silk, was a prestige item from which the treasury derived little if anything. The profits that were to be had from war and expansion went into the pockets of speculators and traders. Therefore the expansion of Han China southward was an important if neglected part of Chinese history since it represented a net gain to the state. It began the slow incorporation into China of all or parts of nine provinces, rich in grain production and comparatively empty to receive great migrations of Chinese farmers from the north.

South of the Yangtze and east of Yunnan lay four kingdoms. They were Yeh Lang (Hunan and a part of Kweichow), Min Yüeh (Fukien), Teh Tung Hai (Chekiang) and Nan Yüeh (Kwangsi, Kwangtung, Tonkin, and a part of northern Annam). The first three of those kingdoms were on easy terms with

Chang-an, and their inhabitants, as well as those of the rich and large Nan Yüeh area, were generally unwarlike—that is, though they contested Chinese penetration and occupation of their lands, they did not have the military capacity of the northern and western horse peoples.

Wu Ti was motivated by two ambitions. The first was the opening of a southern land route to India, which Chang-ch'ien had erroneously reported to be easier and safer than the dangerous western route through Central Asia. The second ambition was to secure sovereignty over these fertile areas into which Chinese had been moving for decades. The impossible terrain between Yunnan and India was to thwart the first ambition (to this day it remains a difficult if not impossible route), but the second ambition was achieved, for between 135 and 110 B.C., Wu Ti was to secure his hold on the central and southern coast of China and to extend his power into the Indochinese peninsula.

In 135 B.C. the Chinese envoy to the court of Nan Yüeh had inadvertently discovered that the West River system connected with a land route that permitted trade goods to pass east from Szechuan. Since Szechuan (the former states of Pa and Shu) was safely in the Han fold, this meant the Chinese could, if the occasion arose, attack Nan Yüeh from the rear. The opportunity came in 112 B.C. when an internal dispute in Nan Yüeh caused Wu Ti to ask that kingdom to come into the Han empire. The rulers were so disposed, but the chief minister was against it. In the controversy that followed, the Chinese envoy, the king, and the queen were murdered. Wu Ti, to avenge his ambassador and achieve his ambitions, opened war. A pincers movement was executed wherein one Chinese army moved against Canton by sea and another by the new interior route, and conquest was comparatively easy. Nan Yüeh became a part of Han in 111 B.C. Cultural absorption of the area was to take another two thousand years, during which political control was shaken off from time to time, depending on the strength of the dynasty in power.

The southwestern areas (modern Szechuan, Yunnan, and part of Kweichow) were a mosaic of petty chiefs and tribal areas that had been opened up by the Chou state of Ch'u and further penetrated by Ch'in. The initial Han emperors had retired, pre-

fering merely to fortify the frontiers. Despite the value of the cloth and bamboo products from this region, the cost of subjugating such a difficult land would have added an insupportable burden to the Han–Hsiung-nu wars. Furthermore, the inhabitants were already amenable to Han trade and friendship. So only the peripheral areas of the southwest became Han Chinese.

A sketch of the Han frontiers would be incomplete without a note on the Han occupation and colonization of parts of northern Korea. The area from the Liao River east to the Yalu and dipping into northwest Korea had known some Chinese influence since the time of the Ch'in dynasty. During the period of the building of the Wall, northwest Korea had been a haven for refugees from Ch'in tyranny who sought safety in the kingdom of Ch'ao-hsien, which was, roughly, east of the Yalu River with its capital at Pyongyang. The first Han emperor had abandoned Chinese control east of the Liao River, leaving the entire area to the Kija dynasty, which ruled Ch'ao-hsien, but exercized only the vaguest sovereignty over southern Manchuria between the Liao and the Yalu. In this area a Chinese deserter, Wei-min, gathered a guerrilla band and in 193 B.C., overthrew the Kija dynasty, and established his own rule over Ch'ao-hsien. The Han governor in the Liao area regarded Wei-min as a vassal but refrained from interference in Ch'ao-hsien until Wei-min's successors began to monopolize the overland trade to China. This situation coincided with the strategic decision at Chang-an to move into southern Manchuria in order to secure a position behind the Hsiung-nu, and a bitter and bloody campaign was fought against Ch'ao-hsien in 109–108 B.C. The Han army succeeded in taking the kingdom, which was then divided into four commanderies, of which the most important was Nang (Lolang). This was to be an area of Han colonization and the fountain of Chinese culture, which was slowly to turn Korea into the most Chinese of vassal areas.

THE ARMY COMMANDERS

Factual accounts of Han history often obscure the spectacular nature of these wars, which were fought across a vast stage of plains, mountains, deserts, and swamps. Chinese armies

marched and countermarched greater distances than armies before or since, save for the cavalry divisions of Genghis Khan more than a thousand years later and the Central Asian campaigns of the T'ang empire. Furthermore, the exploits of Chinese war captains, buried here and there in the annals of Han, fully match those of a Pompey or Scipio Africanus. In the Early Han the greatest field commanders we know of were Li Kuang-li, Li Ling, and Ch'en T'ang, whose courage, fortitude, and skill were needed against the Hsiung-nu.

In 103 B.C. the Chinese agent resident at Kokand became angered by the refusal of the ruler of Sogdiana to turn horse-breeding stock over to the Chinese, and he seized the horses and set off eastward for China. He was chased and killed, and in retribution the emperor sent Li Kuang-li on a punitive expedition, totally disregarding the nature of the two-thousand-mile route across the desert to Kokand. At that time the Tarim area consisted of at least thirty-six oasis kingdoms, which had to be subdued in order to reach Sogdiana, since these oases represented the only sources of food and water for an army. Li Kuang-li fought his way into the middle of the area and then, exhausted, with most of his army dead and without supplies, he fought a magnificent retreat to the western borders of China at Tunhuang. Here he stayed, for the enraged Wu Ti would not permit him to enter China. Two years later he was given reinforcements and again ordered westward. This time, despite the loss of half of his sixty thousand men, he fought his way to the upper valley of the Syr Darya and the capital of Sogdiana, compelled the surrender of the city, and returned with the object of the costly campaign, stud horses.

In 99 B.C. Li Kuang-li's grandson Li Ling underwent a parallel experience, whose tragic ending has remained one of the most compelling stories in Chinese annals. Li Ling, a young man known as an excellent commander, was stationed in western Kansu. He volunteered to lead five thousand infantry deep into Mongolia as a diversion for a strong cavalry attack that was being prepared against the Hsiung-nu. This was the first time that Chinese infantry unsupported by cavalry would be used against Hsiung-nu cavalry, but Li Ling was confident that foot soldiers armed with

crossbows could beat mounted archers. Permission was given to make the diversion, but through a misunderstanding of orders the cavalry column that was to meet and support him on his return never appeared. In November of 99 B.C. Li Ling set out toward modern Urga. Cut off from his base and with no mobile support, he pressed steadily into Hsiung-nu territory for a month, when he was stopped and surrounded by a vastly superior nomad cavalry. Drawing his infantry into a phalanx with the shields and spearmen in the front rank, Li Ling met the charge with an arrow storm that routed and scattered the enemy. Victorious on the field, having proven that infantry properly equipped and commanded could turn back a cavalry attack, Li Ling began his retirement to the Han frontiers. Continuously harassed on his retreat, he managed to beat off every attack, although his men were now exhausted and dangerously short of arrows. He was within a very short distance of the Chinese frontier when a Chinese defector told the Hsiung-nu (who had been on the verge of calling off their pursuit) that Li Ling could expect no help from China and that he was now out of ammunition. Thus encouraged, the horsemen made a final assault on the Chinese as they traversed a narrow valley. The trapped Chinese fought all through the day with anything that came to hand—pikes, swords, wagon axles. At night Li Ling ordered the survivors to scatter while he, to gain time for them, surrendered to the enemy. As a reward for one of the most original and daring exploits in the military history of China, Li Ling was left by an angry Wu Ti, who believed he had been betrayed, to spend the remainder of his life in captivity while his family were exterminated.

In 42 B.C. the Chang-an ambassador to the Hsiung-nu pasturing east of Lake Balkhash was treacherously killed. These Hsiung-nu held the Ili passes, exerted considerable influence in Sogdiana and Ferghana, and were in a particularly good position to envelop the Chinese garrison at Turfan. Ch'en T'ang was cavalry commander in the area, and when news of the assassination reached him, he realized that these Hsiung-nu were preparing to move astride the Silk Road. If he forwarded the news to Chang-an along with a request for action, he could expect the reluctance of high officials to resume an aggressive policy, the

imperial desire to economize, and a bureaucratic delay of literally years. Unless he moved rapidly, the pivotal Chinese post at Turfan was doomed. So he forged an imperial mobilization order and gathered about forty thousand men in the far west. These he organized into six columns. Three of them made a remarkable forced march around the Taklamakan desert and crossed the Pamirs to Sogdiana. The other three columns went directly north of the Taklamakan to Sogdiana. These two forces converged as planned and stormed the nomad headquarters, breaking Hsiung-nu power in the Ili region. (Some experts believe, from Chinese accounts of this battle, that Ch'en T'ang's men fought not only Hsiung-nu but also survivors from the massacre of Crassus' Roman Army of the East.) Ch'en T'ang, like Li Ling before him, was little rewarded for a great military achievement, his forgery and his political enemies weighing heavily against him in the imperial view. "Put not your trust in princes" might well have been the motto of Chinese commanders in the field.

IMPERIAL CONTROL

By the time of the death of Han Wu Ti, those borders of China that all succeeding Chinese dynasties were to regard as the irreducible limits of Chinese dominion had been staked out. Today they can be represented broadly by tracing a frontier from Seoul in Korea to Kashgar in Central Asia and to Hue in Annam. At the same time, the procedure for incorporating new areas into the empire was set, as was the ritual of China's relations with peripheral peoples. New outer areas that were conquered or that voluntarily came under Chinese sovereignty were first treated like protectorates, with Chinese advisers and garrisons. Then they were incorporated as commanderies, with Chinese civil officials, local garrisons, inspectorates, and regular taxes.

The relationship with peoples beyond the newly assimilated areas was relatively simple, once Chinese superiority had been established. These regions were regarded as vassals and had to secure the assent of the emperor for each new ruler. They also were required to send an annual tribute mission to the Chinese capital. These tributes were purely nominal in comparison to the gifts and subsidies returned to the supplicants by the imperial

court. As long as the vassal area recognized the superiority of the Son of Heaven and, above all, kept the peace, the Chinese made no effort to interfere with their affairs, beyond sending an occasional envoy or, even more rarely, establishing a garrison. They hoped that ultimately contact would pacify and Sinicize these barbarians. It was, in effect, moral imperialism based on unswerving belief in the universality of imperial rule and of Chinese culture.

Chinese officials in the vassal areas, in addition to their normal political tasks, were obligated to encourage cultural assimilation, to move people from Shamanism to Confucianism, and from tribal rites to Confucian rites. The reactions varied from region to region. Sinicization was not pressed in the north and west, for example, where the nomadic people could withdraw from Chinese influence at any time they chose by simply riding away. In the south, a land of settled farmers, fishers, and craftsmen, cultural assimilation proceeded steadily although slowly, and was immeasurably aided by the continuous southward migration of Chinese. But this assimilation was not all one-sided. Non-Chinese beliefs and practices penetrated deeply into Han culture. It was a superstitious age anyway, with widespread naturalistic speculation and beliefs in portents, magic, and occult phenomena, the best exponent of which was the great ruler himself, Wu Ti, who conquered the barbarians but was in turn conquered by traditions quite repugnant to Confucianism.

To govern the newly acquired areas, the emperor employed non-scholarly men whose proficiency lay in their long knowledge of barbarian politics, diplomacy, and the art of war. It may have been the rise of this new breed of official that led the erudite men at the court to protest against war and the acquisition of empire in 99 B.C., although their immediate pretext for speaking out was the disastrous defeat of Li Ling's army. They said on that occasion:

> However great a country may be, if it loves war it will perish. Arms are ill omened instruments. The territories which have been wrested from the [Hsiung-nu] are unsuited for cultivation; and furthermore these brutes are incapable of assimilation. It is better

> to ignore them and leave them to pasture their flocks in the solitary wastes.*

Wu paid little attention to them, and it was a generation later that their repeated protests were answered by the Emperor Hsüan:

> The Han have their own code, which is the code of conquerors. We are no longer living in the times of Chou, the age of government by virtue and education. The literati fail to understand the different needs of different times. They speak always of the virtue of antiquity and the evils of the present age . . .†

Hsüan had reason to be impatient with these protesters. He was as great an empire builder as his grandfather Wu Ti. It was he to whom the Hsiung-nu of Mongolia abjectly submitted in 51 B.C.

* R. Grousset, *The Rise and Splendour of the Chinese Empire* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1958), p. 59.
† *Ibid.*, p. 82.

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The Pattern of the Economy

LAND, LABOR, AND GRAIN

The nature of the Chinese economy after the rise of the Han dynasty is as much a matter of controversy among Chinese scholars as is the nature of the ancient political and social system. Like the contemporary debates over the nature of Chinese "feudalism," the various "stages of history," and the analysis of Confucian thought, the economic controversy is largely over semantics and is heavily tinged by competitive modern ideologies. For the real nature of the structure and function of economy is as clear as the words of Wu Ti himself: "Agriculture is the foundation of the world."

The government was sustained, the empire was secured, wealth was accumulated, and China lived through the workings of a natural economy based on land and labor, the chief product of which was grain. The success and endurance of the dynasty and of succeeding dynasties depended upon the health of agriculture, which rose and fell according to each dynasty's degree of wisdom and concern. Also, contradictory interests within the Chinese economy itself worked inexorably and almost cyclically to wreck both farmer and the dynasty. The greatest problem arising from these interests was that productive wealth was di-

vorced from status and power, so the base of real wealth could be destroyed by those who essentially had the highest stake in it but no responsibility for its production. This will be seen in the first century B.C. in the history of the powerful traders and bankers, who through large-scale commercial capitalism accumulated enormous reserves of wealth, but were barred from social and political status, since they comprised a new class held in contempt by traditional thinking.

From the time of Kao-tsu to the time of Wu Ti, perhaps the major concern of the dynasty was the reconstruction of the agrarian economy. Especially during 179–140 B.C., the government expressed a genuine concern for the needs of the farmer. During this period taxes were reasonable, fewer officials exploited the farmer (although the root cause of corruption, low salaries, was not remedied), grain was stored so that it could be sent to famine areas in bad times, and the government diligently propagated new methods of cultivation through what was basically an agricultural extension service. The cultivation of the seventy-two kinds of grain was improved through the use of a plow with separate moldboard and share, draft animals, seeding machines, millstones, and nitrogenous cover crops. This period also saw the beginnings of dry farming and the introduction of wheat culture.

Transportation in the Yellow River area had been tied together by a net of roads and canals, so that Shensi, the heart of the Early Han, which contained one-third of the population and most of the wealth, could be easily maintained. The capital, Chang-an, in the Wei valley, was, like any metropolitan center, a consuming belly never filled. For decades efforts were made to raise food production, and in bad times the wealthy, including the court, were forced to share their great private stores of grain. The population of China then lay along the Yellow River and in eastern Honan, southern Hopei, western Shantung, and Shensi province. It was not an urban population, for aside from Chang-an the great cities were really clots of towns, centering around a walled military-administrative area and deriving their livelihood from their surrounding agricultural districts.

Each of the commanderies tended to be self-sufficient save for salt, metals, and luxury goods, and promotion of national trade

was a major motive for the great industry with which roads and canals were constructed. Taxes were paid in grain (hence the need for good grain transport to the capital area). Salaries were also paid in grain, and wealth was very largely measured in the same commodity, despite the growth and importance of a money economy in this period.

Although grain was an important crop, China's agriculture depended on small farms having differing soils and lying in differing climates, so both farming systems and types of crops varied. There was even variation within the great estates, which, unlike our modern ranches or farms, were simply accumulations of separate small farms. In Early Han years the farmer paid one-thirtieth of his crop in taxes, and it was the basic aim of the government to see that this economy remained on a productive, tax-paying basis. To this end, the great and enduring reform of Ch'in, the right to buy and sell land, was not touched, for it was desirable that the free peasant landowner have this right.

Such concern paid off handsomely at first. Despite the persistence of farm distress and the growing discrepancy between the wealth of mass and of class, which had so greatly disturbed advisers at the beginning of the reign of Wu Ti, the contemporary historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien could describe the state of China in these somewhat glowing terms:

> By the time the present emperor had been on the throne a few years, a period of over seventy years had passed since the founding of the Han dynasty. During that time the nation had met with no major disturbances so that, except in times of flood or drought, every person was well supplied and every family had enough to get along on. The granaries in the city and the countryside were full and the government treasuries were running over with wealth. In the capital the strings of cash had been stacked up by the hundreds of millions until the cords that bound them had rotted away and they could no longer be counted. In the central granary of the government new grain was heaped on top of the old until the building was full and the grain overflowed and piled up outside, where it spoiled and became unfit to eat. Horses were to be seen even in the paths between the fields, and anyone so poor as to have to ride a mare was disdained by his neighbors and not allowed to join the gatherings of the villagers. Even the keepers of the

> community gates ate fine grain and meat. The local officials remained at the same posts long enough to see their sons and grandsons grow to manhood, and the higher officials occupied the same positions so long that they adopted their official titles as surnames. As a result men had a sense of self-respect and regarded it as a serious matter to break the law. Their first concern was to act in accordance with what was right and to avoid shame and dishonor.*

Yet following these words the historian laments the exploitation that permitted the accumulation of tremendous fortunes. He recites examples of the conspicuous excesses of the court, the nobility, and the wealthy and gloomily prophesies: "It has ever been the law of change that when things reach their period of greatest flowering they must begin to decay." The "decay" that Ssu-ma Ch'ien saw around him was partly a traditional scholar's reaction to the rise of a powerful capitalist class and partly a protest against the improverishment of the Chinese economy because of the nearly insupportable burdens of war and empire, which led to very radical economic measures by the central government. As early as 127 B.C. the war levies on money, food, and manpower had exhausted the imperial treasury, emptied the reserves of the nobility, and borne so heavily on the farmer that the government, instead of collecting grain taxes, was forced to foreclose land and inflate prices and currency. When none of these measures worked, the government turned to the engrossment of certain kinds of business and regulation of the market economy, with the consequent destruction of private capitalism in China.

THE GROWTH OF WEALTH AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MERCHANTS

Merchants had begun to acquire greater wealth, and therefore power, during the later Warring States period. One of the most successful of these merchants, Lu Pu-wei, used his wealth to finance a royal prince, on whose accession Lu Pu-wei became prime minister of the rising Ch'in state and lavishly patronized the scholars of the day. Though merchants were traditionally

* B. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961), Vol. II, p. 81.

given an inferior position in Chinese society, their wealth purchased position and, by and large, kept them exempt from punishments.

The Chinese government opposed the accumulation of wealth not directly related to, and dependent on, the functions of government. Private trade undermined the role of government to confer wealth and influence and therefore provided an alternative base of power from which to oppose governmental power. Nonetheless, the great merchants of the Han period are provided with biographies in the official histories of the Han dynasty, an honor they were never again accorded. They rose from all walks of life in all parts of the empire.

Great fortunes were created during the Han age through the shrewd monopoly of certain trades and occupations and also through the clever avoidance of laws by means of bribes and influence. The use and control of money became important as early as 154 B.C., when the dynasty had to go to the moneylenders to feed and equip the troops used to put down the revolt of the feudatories. They found they could get credit only from one banker and had to pay an interest of ten times the amount of the loan, at that. The bankers made their fortunes from industry and business and from consolidating landholdings. They had been the chief beneficiaries of war and empire. Most of the wealthy, barred by their occupations from being a part of the ruling group, had no rank, but many government men of the time had few scruples about enriching themselves and explaining it thus: ". . . when noble-minded men [the educated] are rich, they will love to practice virtue; but when mean-minded men [the illiterate] are rich, they will use [their wealth] to gratify their pleasure in power."*

The protest against the rapid growth of extremes of wealth and poverty in the second century B.C. came from the scholars. They were alarmed at the possibility of the rise to power of a a new kind of class, but they also had at heart the gross poverty and sufferings of their century. They believed, with a great deal of justice, that a harmonious and stable order depended upon a

* N. L. Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1950), p. 423.

just distribution of the wealth. The scholar Tung Chung-shu described his own time in terms quite different from those of his contemporary Ssu-ma Ch'ien, quoted earlier.

Which scholar is to be believed? Both are telling the truth, each in his own way. China's economy under normal conditions of peace and benevolence during the Han reconstruction years was stable. It provided a livelihood for the mass of the Chinese and support for the government, and obviously it had enough surplus to create enormous fortunes for the enterprising. But the economy was not strong enough to withstand both the monopolization of wealth and the costs of the sustained frontier wars of Wu Ti. One or the other had to give way, and Wu Ti decided against the capital and the mercantile class. Mass transfer of the poor and dispossessed to new lands and inflation of the currency had simply added to their misery and bred speculators.

STATE INTERVENTION

Wu Ti's new economic measures, which began in 119 B.C., seem to have been conceived by Chang-t'ang, a favorite of the emperor and the greatest jurist in China. The operation and administration of the measures was placed in the hands of practical men of affairs like Sung Hung-yang, a wealthy merchant who became second secretary of finance and grain intendant, and Tung-kuo Hsien-yang, a great salt factor. They were assisted by K'ung Chin, an ironmaster, and "when it came to a question of how to make a profit . . . the three of them knew their business down to the last detail."* Under these men the grand experimentation began. The currency was devalued, fiat money was issued, and the state monopolized the manufacture of salt and of iron implements. By striking at two principal sources of mercantile wealth, the government did in fact ruin small entrepreneurs of these commodities, though the great salt and iron merchants were not seriously hurt.

Currency inflation hardly bothered the merchants, because they could hoard and they could manipulate prices. (On the other hand, inflation and fiat money, by destruction of the price

* Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

structure, had almost ruined the farmer.) Therefore in 119 B.C. a tax was levied not only on inventory but on capital. Ruthlessly enforced against those who failed to declare their wealth, it had its intended and also unintended effect. It ruined many merchants, which was intended, but it also caused many to invest in land, which did not come under the new property taxes. Normal land taxes were light, and rents and returns were high for the investor. Since the commercial men of city and town were often also the largest landowners, this merely increased the hold of the wealthy on land.

Following this series of destructive acts against the competitive private economy, the government began in 115 B.C. to regulate prices at the market level. First it undertook to sell the grain and goods it received as taxes-in-kind in those areas of China where certain staples were not produced. This did not work well, because officials rigged prices and the cost of transportation more than ate up the government's profit. Then, in 110 B.C., government went directly into the market to regulate prices at the source (although the officials sat only in selected major markets). The farmers and townsmen complained, the merchants complained, and the scholars complained, but all in all the measures worked. The treasury was replenished, the tribute grain came in, and the wealthy commoner class was kept down.

Then a rather ironic thing happened. For years the scholars had attacked the unprecedented development of capitalism. In this they were being quite traditionally Confucian. Now they began to attack the state for interfering with private capital. Confucius knew that man has to earn his bread. Himself a product of a feudal society, he exalted an agrarian way of life and disdained the merchant: "The superior man seeks virtue while the mean man seeks profit." However, he believed that economic prosperity of the people was a foundation of good government. Mencius also held this view most strongly, stating that in prosperous times people are good, while in poor times they are bad, thus showing that economics has its influence on morality. But unlike Mencius, Confucius directed his words on prosperity at the ruling classes, as a guide for their conduct of state affairs. The Confucian viewpoint toward economics could be summed

up as the concept that the material prosperity of a nation does not arise from economic factors but from righteousness—that is, proper government by proper men in their proper place thinking proper thoughts produces prosperity.

The Early Han Confucianists opposed state control of the economy as an innovation not present in the Golden Age, and they also knew that the officials responsible for such matters were Legalists and not Confucianists. Nothing much could be done while Wu Ti was alive, but six years after his death, in 81 B.C., when the Emperor Chao was only fourteen years old, the powerful regent, Ho-kuang, convened sixty great scholars in Chang-an. The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to seek the advice of these worthies on the state of affairs in China. Actually it was a Confucian move to indict the economic administration. We have a good record of this debate in the *Discourses on Salt and Iron,* which were written down about 31 B.C. It is an interesting account of a struggle between a group of realistic politicians who were in power and a group of Confucian scholars who wanted to be in power.

The scholars demanded an end to the salt and iron monopolies, and the debate centered around whether or not it was proper for the state to engage in mercantile activities. The scholars said that the state ought not to compete with the private individual, that it had nobler functions to perform. The officials, led by Sung Hung-yang, defended the actions of the state and attacked the Confucianists as totally impractical men. The officials, presumably of the Legalist school, had other unfavorable views concerning the worth of the Confucianists and their ideas, and the arguments ranged over the entire scope of government, from the functions of administration to the conduct of foreign policy.

The *Discourses* are a marvelous apologia for the reign of Wu Ti. Of particular interest are the insights they give us into the aggressive policy of China in Central Asia. The scholars were not opposed to the necessary defense of China (although some of them would have preferred a moral appeal to the Hsiung-nu), but they pointed out, with truth, that the continental adventures of Wu Ti had been the fiscal ruination of the reign and that there had been no real excuse for pressing into Central Asia. In reply

the officials gave a number of reasons, such as release of population pressure and large-scale acquisition of draft animals, but the most interesting is the argument that foreign trade resulting from expansion benefits the whole nation. Certainly the development of commerce across Asia arising from the wars had enriched merchant traders. One can speculate as to how many of the military adventures were motivated by the demand for new products, for greater supplies of certain goods, or for markets for specialized Chinese products. War and trade were intermixed in the arguments of the *Discourses,* wherein the scholars damn mercantilism as ruining China and benefiting only foreigners, while the officials defend it as a vital part of the Chinese economy. (We do know that the cost of the military operations in South China in 110 B.C. were borne by the Salt and Iron Bureaus.) And the new fiscal measures were also defended on the grounds of general benefit.

The Confucians complained of the exhaustions of war: ". . . much fighting overburdens the people; long campaigns ruin the soldiers. This is the grievance of the people and the concern of your 'bigoted' Confucians." To which the spokesman of the officials replied, "I again assert that the proposal to do away with the salt and iron monopolies and equable marketing would grievously diminish our frontier supplies and impair our military plans. I cannot consider a proposal so heartlessly dismissing the frontier question." To the Confucian argument that the state has no business monopolizing industry, the answer was that the state had to break a monopoly to get war supplies; "Iron implements and soldier's weapons are important in the service of the empire and should not be made the gainful business of everybody." The Confucians were easily able to point out that the state had simply created a new rich—"Since the establishment of the Profit-and-Loss System and the initiation of [the monopolies], the privileged families throng the streets like drifting clouds"—and they advocated a return to a natural economy. The officials answered with sarcasm: "Should the whole Ministry of Finance throw themselves body and soul into practicing farming personally . . . the armies sent out in the four directions would still be without . . . continuous supplies."*

* E. M. Gale, *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (Leiden: Brill, 1931), pp. 39–89.

The Lord Grand Secretary went on to defend the officials, saying, "Thus day and night we ponder and worry over the expenditure of this great Commonwealth, forgetting even sleep while in bed and oblivious of food when hungry. Statistical tables never depart from our presence; we ransack our minds ever searching to solve myriad problems."* He reminded the scholars that Confucius in his own time never achieved good government, and told them they were

> ". . . lovers of disputation, without proper means to support yourself at home and with no great reputation abroad. . . . Clinging to your rotting bamboo slips and holding fast to your empty words, you never want to recognize the necessity of coming to terms or the imperative need of changing with the times. You hold to no firm basis in your discussion, reminding one of persons scratching their backs when their knees are itching. Unbearable is the din of brawls you raise by your railings at the Portals of the Commonwealth. As if your orchestrated vociferation will ever bring practical results.†

This is an interesting remark when one considers the great power and prestige soon to be held by the Confucianists. The records of their arguments in the *Discourses* shows the scholars were not prepared to accept the facts of war and depression, or the fact that the new empire needed a unified economy. Sung knew this when he told the Confucians, "The feudal lord, whose fief can be considered as forming but one household, has his concern limited to his manor. The emperor, whose domain has as its boundaries the Eight Extremities, has concerns extending far and wide."‡

DECLINE OF THE HAN ECONOMY

Wu Ti had left behind him a country of "two nations"—of great wealth for a few and of great poverty for the many. During

* *Ibid.*, p. 59.
† E. M. Gale, P. Boodberg, T. C. Lin, "Discourses on Salt and Iron," *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 65 (1934), p. 101.
‡ Gale, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

the remainder of the first century B.C. the population began to crowd the available land, and although there was fresh land to the south, much of it needed expensive and laborious drainage. Furthermore, the nature of land economy was undergoing a slow but drastic change in this century, as ownership shifted from the small independent farmer to the large tenant estates. Accumulations of profits had little outlet for investment in a government-controlled market and industrial economy, so it flowed into land. Land investments were particularly valuable because the tax system weighed so heavily on the farm producer and so lightly on the farm owner. Merchants paid double poll taxes, dues, assessments, inventory and capital taxes, and even artisans paid an income tax; but the land paid only one-thirtieth of its produce in taxes.

The roots of this tax system lay in two things: the first is what C. M. Wilbur believes to have been a total fixation on a natural economy: "What was at first only a trend in specialization toward intensive, irrigated agriculture became a characteristic, developing ultimately into hypnosis . . ."* The second was the equally deep-seated desire to maintain the right to buy and sell land. In the old Chou days a village paid a single annual tax, but when the Ch'in dynasty freed the land, two burdens were placed on it—the tax paid to the state and the rent paid to the landlord. Because of excessive irregular taxation, the freeholders, unable to pay their taxes, would get into debt and the powerful landlords would buy them out. They would become tenants paying a substantial rent.

As the number of freeholders decreased and the mass of tenants began to live precariously, it took only slight economic shifts to cause vastly depressed conditions throughout the countryside. The merchants were often blamed for this situation (for they tended to become landlords), but the responsibility lay with officials and the state. After all, merchants did not set the taxes nor were they accountable for the petty corruption with which underpaid minor officials exploited the countryside. And officialdom itself got into the land business, which led to a contradiction of

* C. M. Wilbur, *Slavery in the Former Han Dynasty* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1943), p. 89.

interests. Officials knew that their own greatest support came from a reasonably prosperous and independent farming class. At the same time they could not resist buying up the distressed land that their own taxes and their own exemptions from taxes threw on the market. The owner paid only one-thirtieth of his yield, charging the tenant half of the yield in rent.

Considering that the ordinary farmer-owner was subject to conscription for labor or military service, that he never seems to have had adequate reserves for bad years, that no adequate credit system existed, and that he was caught between low grain prices and high commodity prices, it is small wonder that so many farmers in this century became tenants and that so many wealthy men invested in farmland. What amelioration there was in the latter decades of the Early Han came from government economies effected by Confucianist officials during the reigns of Emperor Chao (87–74 B.C.) and Emperor Hsüan (74–48 B.C.). This was done through cutting government expenditures, remitting tax debts, reducing government-controlled prices, making public loans, holding the frontiers, and halting expensive forays into Asia. This twenty-year period also marks the almost complete ascendency of Confucianists in government—not as scholars or pedants, but as politically capable men.

DECLINE OF THE HAN GOVERNMENT

In the years 48–33 the Confucianist fight for reforms and economy had to be intensified, especially because of the resurgence of great agricultural distress, the consequent rise of slavery (selling women and children into domestic slavery was a mark of troubled times in China), and the rising extravagance of the government—an extravagance, as viewed by Confucianist officials of Emperor Yüan's time, that made Wu Ti's court appear to be simple and frugal in comparison. Some of the Confucian reforms were accepted. Expenditures were cut back, and the poll tax on children was raised to age seven from age three. But the essential objective of the Confucianists, that the whole Han money economy be scrapped, was disregarded. Still claiming that the merchants were the root of all economic evils in China, the officials continued to urge a return to a complete agrarian economy

wherein the government would impose a single tax-in-kind on the land and make its payments also in kind. But it was impossible for Han China to revert to a natural economy and maintain both the state and the empire without punitive taxes being laid on the landowners, and this the landowners, who were in large measure the official class, were not prepared to see. Thus many of the reforms advanced by the ministers merely trailed off into moral exhortations, and none of the mild reform measures really bothered the gentry.

Earlier experiences in the dynasty's history had shown how the imperial authority could be undermined or arrogated by relatives of the throne. Yet during the reigns of the Emperors Ch'en and Ai the power of the maternal side of the family was allowed to grow to the point where, in effect, the maternal clans divided the government between them in a giant spoils system.

This situation was aggravated by the willfulness of Emperor Ai, who wished to act autocratically, like Wu Ti, and who issued edicts on his own initiative after he had been blocked by his ministers. Nowhere was the decay of the system more evident than in the rise of Tung-hsien, a young man who had captured the emperor's fancy. In the course of some ten months Tung-hsien had been given more than a hundred million coins. He was taken into the palace, and his relatives were appointed to high positions. When the maternal Fu and Ting clans protested, the emperor had them dismisssed, so that only the Tung clan, among whom there were no competent members, remained his loyal retainers.

The spectacle gave rise to serious concern in the court that the dynasty was coming to an end. The revelation that the Emperor Cheng had killed his own sons presented the specter of a dynasty devouring itself. The Emperor Ai, his successor, was constantly ill and seemed to symbolize the death rattle of the House of Liu.

Scholars persuaded the emperor to adopt new titles and make other changes, in the hope that his continuing illness would be cured and that he would gain an heir. Emboldened by their acceptance, these scholars went on to propose that the highest ministers be dismissed. When the emperor showed no improvement in health, he was advised that the scholars were charlatans

who should be executed for deception. These events, too, produced an effect on a court that was coming to accept the inevitability of the dynasty's end. On one occasion the emperor himself suggested that he resign the throne and turn it over to his favorite, Tung-hsien. His courtiers were profoundly shaken by the proposal, and one remonstrated with the emperor that the empire was an inheritance from his ancestors and that filial piety required him to transmit it to his heirs. When Emperor Ai died suddenly without an heir, Tung-hsien, who had the imperial seals, was unable to act. The court officials, who in general detested him, moved to have him executed. He was impeached, tried, executed, and the assets of his clan confiscated. They totaled some 4,300,000,000 cash, showing the extent to which the favorites of the emperor could parlay their positions into enormous wealth at the expense of the government and empire.

WANG MANG

The Wang clan now gained power and had a child appointed as the Emperor P'ing. Wang Mang, cousin to Emperor Cheng, was then entrusted with the government. When the Emperor P'ing died in the year 5 without an heir, as had his predecessors Ai and Cheng, it was generally interpreted that Heaven's Mandate was being withdrawn from the dynasty. After Wang Mang had suppressed a widespread rebellion, it was clear that Heaven had conferred the mandate on a new dynasty. Even the old imperial family, the Liu clan, seemed to have agreed, and no less than thirty-two members presented portents to Wang Mang, confirming his selection by Heaven, offered congratulations, or helped him to secure his position by informing on rebels or arresting them. Though some courtiers may have concurred only to protect themselves, it is important to note that virtually every famous scholar of the day supported Wang Mang's elevation. The sequence of events shows how seriously leaders of the time accepted the intellectual theories of the Confucian scholars, who had combined into a syncretic state ideology diverse elements of classical Confucian thought, Tsou Yen's five elements theory, Legalist doctrines, and the Yin-Yang theory. These theories, which had once been used by Emperor Wu as a means of

controlling opposition to his policies, had come to dominate the thought of the day to such an extent that they were instrumental, if not decisive, in shifting the throne to another house.

Wang Mang was first a minister to the throne, then regent of China for eight years before becoming emperor. He held the throne for fifteen years. Of his ability and determination there can be no doubt, for he manipulated or controlled the imperial power for a period of twenty-five years, and no usurper of any consequence ever held a throne longer than Wang Mang. During his entire reign he bent all of his efforts to accomplish what the Confucianists had urged for generations: to stabilize the agrarian economy.

It is difficult to arrive at a reasonable judgment about Wang Mang. Though he died a failure and was damned by the historians of Later Han as a usurper and destroyer, it is still possible to see in him a man striking at real evils. He might have succeeded had he come after Wu Ti, with a Ho-kuang as his chief minister. But he came too late, his foes were numerous and powerful, and in any case he could not have stemmed the Yellow River, whose ravaging floods did more to ruin him than the opposition of men. His enemies pointed out that when P'ing died and Wang Mang chose a baby as emperor while he became acting emperor, he revealed his true nature and ambition, for there were at the time over fifty legitimate adult claimants to the throne, and there was no need to choose an infant. Yet Wang Mang had risen not only through intrigue and familial connections but through abilities of a high order. He was a scrupulous Confucianist, being careful at every step to conform with traditional ways, refusing honors, titles, and wealth so graciously that each refusal brought more honors. He achieved the highest power, in effect, by backing into it, reluctantly. Once in power, he took advantage of the pervasiveness of Confucianist thinking among the decision-makers by being the most Confucian of all, hence the most appealing to their intellectual and emotional cast.

Not everyone in this period was delighted with him. Those highly placed men over whose claims to the throne he had passed in 5 A.D. launched at least six revolts against him during the period 5–8 A.D., each of which was crushed. In 8 A.D. the three-year-old

emperor was dethroned, according to the omens. By the same omens, Wang Mang became the first emperor of the Hsin (New) dynasty, and the members of the old imperial family, the Liu, were degraded.

It is at this point that the real argument begins between those who regarded him as a sincere but belated reformer trying to do his best for China—to rescue the farmer from debt and tenancy, to equalize the burden of taxes, to check the growth of the powerful families who monopolized land, wealth, and politics—and those who regarded him as a double-dealer who perverted the texts and the omens for his own purposes, and whose economic measures, far from helping the economy, destroyed it in order to enrich the palace. We have little evidence upon which to base a reasonable assessment of this pivotal reign. For one thing we do not know the effects of Wang Mang's reforms, and for another, we really do not know why so many of them were rescinded during his lifetime.

His reforms were basically patterned along two lines: a tight control of the money economy, nationalization of land, and sharing out, on fair terms, land for agriculture. In accord with traditional Han policy, both these aims were intended to encourage agriculture and to discourage wealth gained through trade and commerce. Fiat money was issued, the variety of money was increased, gold was nationalized, and on three occasions the value of the coinage was changed. The manipulation and depreciation of money affected the gentry and the merchants much more than the government or the peasant. The government stored and hoarded gold and issued money, while the farmer bartered and paid taxes-in-kind anyway. The old salt and iron monopolies, which had survived the arguments against them, were continued, but to them were added a government monopoly of liquors and in 9 A.D. a monopoly of the products of "mountain and sea"—that is, of fishing, hunting, and wood gathering. Control of these commodities by the state was ultimately harmful. Many people were deprived, through severe license regulations, of the means of making a living. The penal measures enacted to enforce the edicts were harsh, and the prices of salt, iron, and other government commodities went to inflationary levels. Then, in an ef-

fort to control prices as well as manufacture and production, Wang Mang revived the old "equalization of the market" concept, wherein the government set the price for grains and textiles at the major markets. Taxes were placed on declared incomes of all occupations except farming, heavy levies were made on the income and property of officials, and government salaries were cut. Thus far Wang Mang, in his economic measures, had not been original. Government monopolies were a hundred years old at least, official fortunes had been sequestered before, the currency had also been juggled by Wu Ti, and as for price-fixing, Chinese governments for centuries had tried to equalize the price of grain by speculating in it. And while it is true that this legislation was designed to produce revenue for the state (which needed it badly) and that much of it vanished in the pockets of corrupt officials, leaving the state little better off than before, it is also true that the bulk of the measures seem designed to get the landlord and moneylender off the back of the peasant. Wang Mang, to achieve his aim, resorted to punitive fiscal measures and controls, but his most important controversial step was the land legislation he promulgated to create a class of small freeholders. He was both enraged and apprehensive over the human and economic deterioration on the land. The land was nationalized. That is, its transfer was forbidden and a maximum limit was placed on holdings, thus forcing large owners to divest themselves of land which, because it could not be sold, dropped abruptly in value.

Slavery was abolished save for those in penal servitude; only the state could hold slaves. The landless and the tenants were to receive their share of land from the big estates, and the state would advance them credit to tide them over. This law was in effect only two years before it was repealed. The land limitation measures were of a type that had been advocated for centuries by great men in China as necessary for the health of the natural economy. The trouble was not that the laws were excessive but that they came too late to help. Primarily they were defeated by the legacy of misery, which, by Wang Mang's time, no amount of laws could conquer. When the land laws failed, all else was bound to fail, for these were the ultimate measures by which

concentrations of wealth in China could be dispersed. Powerful men and powerful groups hated Wang Mang. The landowners, who were the very officials delegated to enforce the land distribution policy, opposed him and raised a revolt against him. This may have been the cause for repeal of the law. The final events that brought him down, however, were a series of natural calamities.

At the beginning of his reign slightly more than half of the population of China lived on the plains just south of the Yellow River, which then emptied into the sea north of the Shantung peninsula in the vicinity of modern Tientsin. In 11 A.D. a catastrophic change occurred in the course of the river when it turned its mouth south of the Shantung peninsula. This was the culmination of a series of dike breaks and floods, which inundated enormous areas, forcing a slow and massive migration of population southward from the Shantung area and the plains of the river. It is estimated that about half of the population of China was affected by the change in the river. Conditions were very bad southward along the main routes of migration to the Han, Siang, Kan, and Yangtze rivers, and the government was neither able to curb the misery nor to handle the migrations. A decade later a great frost destroyed the crops in East China.

In the same year banditry became a problem in the country. In Nanyang Commandery (southern Honan and northern Hupei) the bandits were led by a secret society called the Red Eyebrows, who had been forced out of their homes in Shantung by the floods and famine. This banditry and the general feeling already excited by misery and hunger played into the hands of the aristocratic enemies of Wang Mang, for it gave them a popular cause to lead. In 22 A.D. a revolt in Nanyang Commandery was led by the Liu family. Control of that commandery was seized, and Liu-hsüan, the leader, was set up as the Keng-shih emperor. One by one the gentry assembled private armies from among the peasantry, and commandery after commandery (there were 105 at that time) broke away from Chang-an. Wang Mang was forced into a defensive position to protect his capital, but in 23 A.D. rebellion arose in the city, and in October of that year Wang Mang was killed in his palace. The Keng-shih emperor transferred his

capital to Chang-an from Loyang and gave himself up to drunkness and debauchery, so that the administration of the empire fell into the hands of his in-laws, led by Chao Meng. As a result of his behavior and the rival power of the Chao clan, there was a conspiracy against the emperor, who was forced to flee. He joined the Red Eyebrow rebels, who first welcomed and later executed him. He was succeeded by his third cousin, Liu-hsiu, who had played a prominent part in the revolt against Wang Mang. Liu-hsiu succeeded in 25 A.D. in establishing himself as emperor. He is known to history as Emperor Kuang-wu, and his reign is considered the first reign of the Restored or Eastern Han or Later Han dynasty.

Civil war continued in China until 36 A.D. For one thing, despite the victory of the Honan gentry, the Red Eyebrows did not stop fighting. Their objective was not merely the restoration of the old order but a stake in whatever order triumphed. For another thing, the struggle against Wang Mang had seen a momentary triumph of that constant tendency of China to separate into its constituent regions. Kuang-wu spent the remainder of his reign, until 57 A.D., pulling the country together again.

Those who won were the great landlords, and their victory begins again the ascendancy of the magnates. Through their control of land, credit, capital, and through intermarriage, they dominated government, education, and wealth for much of the Later Han dynasty. The troubles of the Hsin dynasty and the consequent civil wars brought such a measure of shock and exhaustion from their excesses that Later Han thought and government were literally obliged to be more humane than that of Early Han.

❁ *RETROSPECT*

The long and exciting epochs dating from the Duke of Chou (ca. 1027 B.C.) to the death of Wang Mang (23 A.D.) were the age in which China was formed. The fundamental conditions of Chinese life and society, the way they regarded the universe, the way they governed themselves, and the way they wrested their

living from nature, became set enough to be called traditional. In the many centuries that still lie ahead, there will be much change and growth, but it will occur within the framework of the great traditions, and there will be an unusual kind of reinforcing feedback. For not the least of the traditions will be the assumption by the creators of Chinese literature that they do live in a traditional society. The burden of Chinese writing will be directed toward the past.

We have seen that the slow transformation from the regionalism of Chou to the universalism of Han was accompanied by a philosophy that legitimatized new institutions and infused them with vitality. The Chinese were a realistic people whose great masters of thought tended to approach life from the most practical points of view. In working out rational and naturalistic schemes for everything in Heaven and on Earth, they developed an unusual harmony between the accepted values of society and its actual institutions. Yet the Confucianist masters also circumscribed the Chinese mind, for a civilization that believes that mankind has nothing before it but the enjoyment of right and virtuous action loses the capacity for responding to new challenges. The belief that the highest goal is the orderly functioning of society, wherein the same ancient unchanging ideals are applied to all phases of social development and to all human beings, tended to result in a frigid and mechanical imitation of the past. The capacity to respond to new challenges was helped, on the one hand, by a preoccupation with means as well as ends, by a humanitarian concern for the improvement of society, and by a common-sense attitude toward the impact of time on eternal modes of perfection. It was hindered, on the other hand, by a belief in the social order as a natural order.

Confucianists believed it was natural, for example, for some men to be rich and some poor, some superior in intellect and some ignorant. They bent every effort to maintain their ideal kind of society. "The young serve the old; the inferior serves the noble; the degenerate serve the worthy." One had to live in the style of life that accorded with one's occupation and possessions or wealth, and it was expected that government would enforce this distinction. In addition, strict rules on intermarriage between

lower and upper classes were maintained to prevent the adulteration of the talent and virtue that marked the superior family. In such a society there could be no law in the Legalist sense, giving out reward and punishment by objective standards without regard to the difference between men. Confucian society was governed both by law and by rules of behavior. These rules of behavior applied to all, but particularly to the small upper class exempt from the processes of positive law. For this class the social sanction of their peers had as great a controlling effect as had the law on their inferiors. Confucianism did not reject law, it just believed that moral suasion was the greater guarantee of order and stability. An absolute monarchy was supported by the Han Confucianists as the most desirable form of government, not only for their own ends but for the public good. It was believed that "if the nature of all men were already good, then what would be left for the king to do when he assumed his calling?" Since the state was an educational institution dependent upon the worthy influence of the ruler, a primary principle of government was "rectification," the constant self-correction of the ruler. It was held that if moral influence determined the degree of order in society and if this moral influence sprang from the ruler, then an immoral and unworthy ruler engendered periods of disorder.

This dependence on men and on virtue rather than on law is exactly what the Legalists argued against, predicting that it would, as it did from time to time, lead to instability and disorder. To ensure the correctness of the ruler, the Confucians established two safeguards. One was the justification of revolution against a bad ruler. To use a medieval Western illustration, no Chinese emperor could turn his *dominium* into *proprietas*. He could not pervert his Heaven-given dominion over China into mere proprietorship. When this happened, nature herself protested, and men could rise against him. The other safeguard was devised to place the educated Confucian outside the power of the emperor. While he could make or break any man, he could not deprive an educated and qualified official of his intellectual status and privileges.

The great historical question arising from this formative age concerns the economy of China. If Chou were indeed a feudal

society, then why did it not produce, as did the European prototype of feudalism, a capitalistic society? To explain this, we must either adjust the historically accepted description of Chou feudalism or else seek some other theory for post-Chou economic development. It has been suggested by J. Levenson that Chou progressed from its beginnings into feudalism in an ordinary enough way but that the intense experience with positive law during the Ch'in dynasty caused China to reject law in favor of morality. Therefore the great base for capitalism, contractual legalism, never emerged in China.

Whatever the explanation, we know that accumulations of wealth and power based on capital, especially capital acquired by the non-elite, were always under attack during this period. It was difficult enough in the first place for a commoner to acquire a fortune, because the great free markets from which a trading class rises never seem to have developed. It was not merely that transportation and distribution were troublesome, or that Chinese cities were not ideally situated as distribution centers like European cities such as Antwerp, Leipzig, or Mainz, it was that China was regionally self-sufficient, and goods produced in only a few places but desired by all were monopolized by the government and taken out of the free market. Government control of economic activities starts very early in China, almost with the beginning of officialdom, whereas in Europe the private sector of the economy emerged first. Furthermore, China was not a wealthy country. Except in people, her resources were limited, and the ruling group, sensing they had an economy of scarcity, throttled demand in order to maintain social order and satisfy the government need for funds. Need alone probably put the government into business. Capitalism could not have thrived with the government skimming the taxes off for its own support and with those taxes paid in kind. Despite the impressions of a money economy one may get from reading about various manipulations of currency during Han, the fact is that money—copper coin—was used for minor transactions. For major transactions standard weights of valuable things—gold or silk—were used. Almost all rents, taxes, and wages were paid in kind (whether labor, food, or products). As collector of taxes and therefore of

a substantial portion "in kind," the government of China was more or less in business.

The Han dynasty was stuck with a natural economy, and if any economic class rather than the government had controlled or monopolized the economy, then the dynasty would have gone bankrupt. In Europe merchant capital evolved from the wreckage of local authority before the development of a powerful central authority. In China a powerful central authority developed first, and it worked to stultify the growth of merchant capital. Though accumulation of individual wealth was permissible, capitalism was always frozen at the speculative stage, where it was onerous to people and to government alike and consequently repressed through rationalization. The moneyed middle class had every weapon of the state used against them. Ironically enough, this same group seem to acquiesce in their own destruction. In a Confucianist society every man carries the burden of striving to be respectable in the eyes of the dominant class and of wanting to be accepted by this class on its own terms. Confucianism made Chinese rather ashamed to talk of money-making (so did Taoism, which taught a disregard for the material things of life). There was a social prejudice against mere money-making occupations. The prized family system was not adapted for large-scale and impersonal production, although it was the most efficient and natural organization for an agrarian economy. So we have the incongruity of a sophisticated court and civilized bureaucracy subsisting on direct revenue from produce and of a mercantile class more avid for status than for profits and power. Finally, the entire ruling class had a vested interest in land, and any economic changes that threatened the status of land as the measure of wealth was successfully rejected. This ruling class reproduced itself because entry to it, through learning and examinations, was open only to those able to live without toiling.

PART III

A CYCLE OF CATHAY FROM RESTORATION TO RESTORATION

[16]

The Apex of the Han Empire

CENTRAL ASIA

In the late eighteenth century one of the greatest historians began his work on the Roman Empire with the sentence: "In the second century of the Christian era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth and the most civilized portion thereof." If Gibbon were to rewrite that brilliant generalization about Rome, he would be hard put to justify the superlatives in light of what later historians learned about the power and extent of the Han empire of the same period. The China that Kuang-wu, conquerer of Wang Mang, had rebuilt was greater in extent than the Roman Empire and probably greater in wealth and population. As to fairness and civilization —the first is a matter of taste and the second a matter of argument. The essential difference between the two empires is that the second century A.D. was the high noon of order, prosperity, and peace for the Roman Empire, while it was the luminous twilight of the first great Chinese Empire.

During the civil wars of Wang Mang there had been some

lapse of Chinese power in Central Asia (that area bounded on the north by the T'ien-shan range, on the south by the K'un-lun range, on the east by the Nan-shan extension of the K'un-lun range, and on the west by the Pamirs, which link the T'ien-shan and the Hindu Kush). The Chinese still held the road to Turkestan, although their grip on the oasis of Hami and Turfan had weakened. The non-Chinese centers of Yarkand and Khotan had grown in power, and the nomads had begun to edge their way back across the caravan routes. China had found an unexpected ally in hunger when famine in the steppes led to dissension among the nomads and a consequent revolt among the tribes in Inner Mongolia. Some of these tribes had decided to accept Chinese sovereignty and subsidies in return for acting as guards along the Great Wall. The Tibetan chiefs of the Kokonor region had presented their area to China. In 40 A.D. the Tonkin area had revolted, and it had taken three years of military campaigning to subdue the Annamese, including the building of a great military highway across the southern ranges of the Nanling mountains.

By the middle of the first century the borders were reasonably secure, but the caravan routes through the oasis, one along the rim of the T'ien-shan in the north and one along the Pamirs in the south, were not absolutely secure as long as the Huns, who lay in an arc along the Khangai range, could interrupt them. It was this and the threat of a new Hsiung-nu empire that led to a new Chinese conquest and penetration of Central Asia. In 73–74 A.D., a Chinese army moved into the Tarim basin to scatter the Huns and put Chinese garrisons in Hami (heart of the western Gobi) and in Turfan. This expedition brought to fame the great soldier and Viceroy Pan Ch'ao, conqueror of Khotan and the Lop-nor oasis kingdom.

In 75 A.D. the entire Tarim region rose against Chinese control and the main Chinese army at Kashgar was beseiged. When the news reached Loyang, the court at the urging of anti-imperialist minister-scholars ordered the entire area abandoned. Pan Ch'ao disobeyed his civil superior, declaring "Our life and death is to be decided today; what do we care for the opinions of a common civil servant," and in the tradition of former great cap-

Orkhon R.
T'ien-shan Range
Turfan
Hami
Gobi Desert
Pamirs Range
Taklamakan Desert
Khotan
K'un-lun-shan Range
Nan-shan Range
Ordos Desert
HOPEI
KANSU
SHANSI
Lanchow
SHENSI
Loyang
Chang-an
SZECHUAN
CHEKIANG
KWEICHOW
ASSAM
Brahmaputra R.
Chindwin R.
Bengal
Kunming
KWANGSI
FUKIEN
KWANGTUNG
YUNNAN
Irriwaddy R.
TONKIN
BURMA
Mekong R.
A CYCLE OF CATHAY

tains began an unsupported reconquest on his own. With a handful of Chinese troops and vassal auxiliaries, plus his own remarkable skill as diplomatist and soldier, and with practically no supplies from the government, he spent sixteen years re-establishing imperial power in Central Asia, pushing Chinese conquest to its uttermost limits. His objective was to beat the enemy in its homeland. He was a master of maneuver and guile, and he worked upon the principle of "divide and rule," of "barbarian against barbarian." By 87 A.D. he had retaken Kashgar; by 88 A.D., Yarkand. By 91 A.D. his armies were on the Orkhon River in the heartland of the Hsiung-nu. By 94 A.D. he had seized Karashahr, the last non-Chinese oasis, and in 97 A.D. he and his armies stood in Europe on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

A grateful court proclaimed him "Protector of the Western Regions." Not only had he made Han China master of Central Asia, but he had come close to a Sino-Roman meeting. The Chinese had long wanted to find out about the Western silk market, concerning which they knew nothing, once their caravans had passed the borders of Parthia. The envoy Kan Ying entered Parthia (97 A.D.) and got as far as the shores of the Black Sea en route to Ta Ts'in (Rome) when he was talked out of proceeding further by the Parthians, who were reluctant to drop their profitable distributive role in the Chinese trade. It is actually possible that these middle men were the only ones who really profited by the silk trade, for commerce in that commodity was a drain on both Rome and China. The border wars of the late second century depleted China of war horses, which had to be replenished from Central Asian studs by payment in silk, which the Chinese government paid for through heavy taxation. The Roman elite bought silk so heavily that Tiberius complained that "the ladies and their baubles are transferring our money to foreigners." It was then estimated in Rome that the luxury trade out of Asia cost Rome 550,000 sesterces annually. We now know that the Romans were trying to open up both sea and land routes to the place where silk came from. In 116 Trajan's armies entered Ctesiphon, the capital of Parthia, within marching distance of Chinese garrisons.

Pan Ch'ao died within a month of his triumphant return (102

A.D.), and those who replaced him understood neither the western regions nor its people and failed to govern with Pan Ch'ao's toughness or economy of forces. In 106, states of the Tarim region again revolted against the Han empire, and once again some Confucian scholars urged withdrawal from the region. Opposing opinions prevailed, and the task of reconquest was undertaken in 123–127 by Pan Yung, but the frontiers of Han were never absolutely restored. The long lines of communications into Central Asia were vulnerable to harassment. Eastern Kansu and the Ordos desert were raided by Hsiung-nu and Tibetan tribes, which had been settled there as a diplomatic move to preserve the peace. Increasingly, barbarian pressures were applied along the whole of the frontier stretching from the northeast to Central Asia. The Chiang tribes on the Tibetan frontier were a constant threat, and the Hsien-pi tribes made frequent incursions into the border regions of Hopei, Shansi, and Shensi. In 140 a chief of the southern Hsiung-nu broke the truce in the Ordos and initiated a series of raids that eventually threatened even Chang-an until the Huns were finally put down in 143. In 155, the southern Huns again sent raiding parties across the frontiers, and in 171 they defeated a large Chinese army in the north.

THE SOUTH

The migration into the south, begun in Ch'in, was accelerated by the difficulties caused by disastrous flooding of the Yellow River during Wang Mang's reign; it continued throughout the Later Han period. The extent of migration was not clearly perceived by Han officials, but it exercised a profound impact on governmental policy. In the census of 2 A.D. only one-fourth of the registered population of the empire lived in the southern regions, while in 140 A.D. just under one-half lived in the south, a shift of perhaps 15,000,000 people. The migration proceeded southward along river valleys, opening up the fertile alluvium to cultivation and displacing the aborigines, who were driven into wilder regions or into the hills less suitable to cultivation. Settlers who abandoned their homes and migrated to new lands were an administrative problem, because they undermined the fiscal base of the region from which they had emigrated and

paid no new taxes until they were enrolled on the tax registers of their new home. Efforts were repeatedly made to put an end to migration or, failing that, to reregister the migrants, often with promises of temporary relief from taxation. The scale of migration entailed a considerable pressure from indigenous non-Chinese populations, who repeatedly revolted against Chinese authorities. At the same time, Chinese officials made efforts to Sinicize those barbarians within their territories. This policy, together with the increase of Chinese in the region, resulted in the effective incorporation of the south into Chinese culture.

In Yunnan and Szechuan, in the southwest, the situation was different. The Later Han dynasty never established full control over these areas. In addition, the conquests of the areas during the former Han dynasty had left the tribal social forms intact. The emperor merely gave the tribal chieftans seals as kings. On the other hand, barbarians beyond the frontier in this area often surrendered voluntarily to Chinese control, not out of admiration for the virtue of the Chinese emperor, as Confucians stated, but because of interest in the profits of trade developing between China and India and Burma. The Chinese themselves apparently also realized the profitableness of such trade, for they made great efforts to maintain their hold over this region and improved communications by building a suspension bridge over the Mekong River. Thus peace was beneficial to the Chinese, the barbarians, and the merchants alike.

INDIA

At the same time the captains of the West opened up the road to Rome, they opened up routes to India, which in turn opened up still more routes to Rome. They represent the longest and probably most difficult land trade routes ever established. The main silk route westward extended from Kansu to Antioch in Syria. From China to Merv the Chinese controlled it. From Merv to the Euphrates it came under, first, Parthian control (to 224 A.D.), then under Persian control, and finally Arab. From the Euphrates to Rome it was under Roman and then Byzantine control. Across it passed, east to west, cinnamon, rhubarb, furs, and the prime commodity, silk. Back to China, west to east, went

glass, textiles, and other luxury goods. From Antioch the eastward caravans went to Heliopolis, just east of Aleppo, whence they moved to Baghdad on the Euphrates. At Baghdad they turned east, via Ecbatana, to Merv. Merv was the great transshipment center, the junction of the Silk Road. The northern route went through the great oasis cities of Samarkand, Ferghana, and Kashgar. At Kashgar it swung north of the terrible Taklamakan desert and passed through Turfan and Hami to Lanchow, the western gateway of China in Kansu. The southern route out of Merv entered India via Balkh, Kabul, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi, the Indian terminus, from where the goods were transported on into India.

There was another land route from India that took the difficult route through Assam and Burma. Starting at Patna it crossed into Bengal and Assam, advancing to the Brahmaputra River, following along that river or the Chindwin or Irriwaddy rivers to Bhamo, at which point it took a dangerous trek over the mountains to Kunming. There were also Roman and Hindu sea routes into extreme South China. By mid first century the Romans shipped goods overland from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, where they were loaded for the long sea voyage to Tonkin. By the second century Cambodia (Champa) was an area of Hindu culture (Cambodia had already been colonized in the first century by Hindus), and Hindu culture and trade met Chinese culture and trade at the Annam-Tonkin borders. Though the bulk of the silk trade came by sea through the South Asian ports, a substantial amount was carried on the overland route. It continued to be carried westward until 552, when two monks smuggled silkworm eggs and the secret of silk weaving to Byzantium, thus breaking the Chinese production monopoly. By that time the rising Turkish power in Central Asia had interrupted the land route, while within a century the sea road also was blocked by the Arab conquest of the eastern Mediterranean.

The most important thing that ever passed across the great caravan routes was neither silk nor furs but Indian culture, slowly and imperceptibly moving along the highroads of Central Asia and bringing with it Buddhism. The age of the Kushan empire (78–176 A.D.) saw the penetration of Buddhism into the

Tarim basin. Along the chain of oasis cities of both the northern and southern routes, centers of Buddhist and Sanskrit learning developed in Indian market and trade centers. By the second century there began to move between India and China a stream of religious scholars and pilgrims, whose texts and teachings were eventually to have an enormous influence on Chinese life and thought.

CHANG-AN

This empire and that of all Later Han was controlled and administered from a capital whose magnificance matched the extent of the empire. The imperial palace at Chang-an extended over a great area. It was really a complex of many buildings, including the living quarters of the emperor, apartments for women, archives, buildings for officials, and the "thousand rows of huts for the garrisons of the palace whose patrols crossed in all directions." The Blazing Sun building is described as having chambers that did not reveal the building materials, and walls that did not disclose their shape, the surfaces being covered with embroidered silk hangings. Pearl, gold, jade discs, kingfisher feathers, and precious stones also adorned the walls. The hall itself gleamed with precious stones, with coral and rare woods. In the archives, "venerable elders patient in instruction, famous Confucians and learned scholars were commanded to expound and discuss in relation to the Scriptures." Flying galleries led across the city walls to an outer palace, which "had a thousand doors, and its ten thousand windows could be opened and shut . . . and its roof beams went higher and higher." And within this complex of palaces "wherever the emperor went . . . if he stayed to the end of his days, forgetting to return to his chamber [the pleasure] would be inexhaustible." For ". . . strong men balanced weights, acrobats and jugglers performed . . . choirs dressed as fairies and sang, and men in the skins of bears and leopards danced, and others as white tigers struck great lutes, whilst green dragons played great flutes. Some dancers first would be like the whirlwind and then like falling snow. A colossal beast would appear, eight hundred feet long, and when it turned its back it was a fairy mountain with precipitous sides and bears and

tigers pouncing on each other . . . conjurers would suddenly change their appearance and split their shapes, swallow swords and belch fire." If the emperor went to hunt in his park, the game were terrified by "thunderous bangings and lightning-like flashes; . . . then the slaughter began with arrows and spears and swords wielded by the soldiers and their officers, a wind of feathers and a rain of blood covering the ground and darkening the sky. Skilled hunters did prodigies of daring, killing maddened tigers and rhinoceroses with their own hands."*

* E. R. Hughes, *Two Chinese Poets: Vignettes of Han Life and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 30–31.

[17]

The Decline of the Han Government

ECONOMIC CHANGES

After 57 A.D. control of this capital and its empire was the prize in a struggle between several well-defined cliques and groups: the hereditary aristocracy, the wealthy landholders, the "external clans" (relatives of the empress), the eunuchs, and the literati. The oldest and strongest of these were the great aristocratic landholding families whose estates already dominated North China, for their combined forces had defeated Wang Mang and restored the Han dynasty.

The Later Han was a period of comparative peace in most of the empire, even though tribal revolutions flared in the south and the northern frontier was unstable. This period witnessed a continuous expansion of the Chinese economy and the change from a natural economy to an exchange economy. The penetration of Chinese culture into the south, improved communications, the decline of the North China plain—all contributed to the rapid and, unfortunately, disproportionate distribution of wealth and luxury, unheard of in the past. The exchange economy

intensified the division of labor, and though numerous technological improvements increased productivity, it concentrated greater power in the government and in the great families who effectively controlled government at the local levels.

The hereditary aristocracy, confident of their position and privileged to hold all the main governmental posts, lived on revenues from the land as absentee landlords over tenant farmers, serfs, and slaves. They spent their time at court, providing a part of the brilliant spectacle recorded by poets and historians and contributing to the insatiable demand for expensive and exotic luxuries. Their life was spent in hunting and entertainment, and because these activities were limited in variety, they spent their time in a perpetual search for escape from boredom through extravagance and luxurious living. Rather deficient in culture, they developed a supremely arrogant manner coupled with apathy springing from their protected sinecures. Their hatred for the imperial relatives by marriage, the literati, and the eunuchs knew no bounds.

At the local level, the aristocrats were mirrored by wealthy landholders, who educated their sons for the bureaucracy and who represented the government itself. They had a monopoly on literacy, which was their claim to power, and saw their mission as the protection of Confucian tradition, with the incidental enrichment of themselves. Within the bureaucracy they often held sinecures, in which position they, too, hated the eunuchs and the relatives of the empress, as well as the aristocracy. For the farmer —who through local disasters, poor government, and ineptitude had been reduced to near starvation and been forced to commend himself to the local magnate, to flee to the cities, or to migrate south—they felt contempt, which is vividly seen in a famous passage from the first century A.D.

> The gambler came upon a farmer clearing away weeds. He had a straw hat on his head and a hoe in his hands. His face was black, his hands and feet were covered with calluses, his skin was as rough as mulberry bark, and his feet resembled bears' paws. He crouched in the fields, his sweat mixing with the mud. The gambler said to him: "You cultivate the fields in oppressive summer heat. Your back is encrusted with salt, your legs look like

burnt stumps, your skin is like leather that cannot be pierced by an awl. You hobble along on misshapen feet and painful legs. Shall I call you a plant or a tree? Yet you can move your body and limbs. Shall I call you a bird or beast? Yet you possess a human face. What a fate to be born with such base qualities."*

THE LITERATI AND THE EUNUCHS

A third clique was represented by the relatives of the empress, who owed their position to her influence on the emperor. Because their power had no security and they might easily fall victim to an intrigue and lose everything, they took full advantage of the opportunity to loot the empire while it lasted. They were hated for their vulgarity by the Confucians, who envied them their wealth and power, and they were seen as a threat to the sinecures of the aristocracy. One of the patterns of Chinese imperial history is the way in which consorts and dowagers could use the family system to control the palace. The real power of the external clans was demonstrated after the death of Shun Ti when the Empress Liang, following the dictates of the head of her clan, Liang Chi, named the weakling Liu Chih to the throne as Emperor Huan (147–167). Liang Chi proceeded to accumulate every conceivable important post in his his own person. He dominated the government as grand marshal, amassed a fortune of 3 billion cash, put two puppet emperors on the throne, placed his relatives in positions of authority, and lived in unexampled luxury. His clan supplied the government with two marshals, three empresses, six imperial concubines, seven marquises, and fifty-seven other high officials. His palace was built with pleasure quarters rivaling the emperor's, including a park with an artificial landscape and exotic birds imported at great cost. The vast power and influence of the clan was brought to an end in 159, when the emperor instigated a coup d'état, led by five of his trusted eunuchs, during which Liang Chi was assassinated. The rest of the clan was executed, and everyone associated with it was ruined through confiscation.

The eunuchs were the fourth important clique or power

* E-Tu Zen Sun and John De Frances, *Chinese Social History* (Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1956), p. 12.

group in the Han capital. They were of plebeian origin, often coming from aboriginal tribes in the south, who sent them as tribute to the throne. They were despised by all factions for their "injury," and were tolerated only because they were an essential part of palace functioning. Imperial life was secluded—by the end of the first century an emperor seldom left the palace buildings—and the only people on close terms with him were his women and their eunuch attendants. For a young emperor, born and bred in the palace environment, the companionship and advice of such people seemed natural, and in such circumstances it was not at all difficult for the eunuchs to gain control of awards, appointments, titles, and honors. On the other hand, they proved utterly faithful and were a useful buffer against patronizing aristocrats, tyrannical relatives, and the ever-moralizing and critical literati.

With the destruction of the Liang clan, the eunuchs gained the ascendancy. They were lavishly rewarded by the emperor, each being given a marquisate, the revenues of taxation from 76,000 families, and 56 million cash. The eunuchs are described as cunning, ruthless, and unscrupulous by those who wrote the Official History, but it was they who recognized the value of technology and contributed a number of significant innovations, including the invention of paper. They also recognized the value of business and commerce, which the Confucians detested and condemned, and maintained relations with the merchants and industrialists. In general they were perhaps more receptive to new ideas than the literati. Though ignorant and often unintelligent, they made efforts at learning, showed marked interest in scientific matters, and once attempted to formalize their education by setting up a university in competition with the university that produced the literati. This proved to be the issue that brought their conflict with the literati to a head.

The literati were educated Confucians. Their monopoly on education was the source of their power and they wished to maintain it. Though they staffed the government, they were unconcerned with day-to-day administrative needs. Instead, they concentrated on principles of government and morality, general education, and philosophical speculations on the interpretation

of omens and ancient texts. By Later Han times, the civil service had deteriorated from the high standards reached near the end of the Early Han. In the former period it had been honestly administered, and poor men could enter the service. In the second century the provincial governors were still obliged to send to the capital any employee of conspicuous ability, but patronage played a larger and larger part. The big jobs went to the important families close to the imperial family and therefore predominantly from the capital district. The examinations lost their original purpose; posts, ranks, and jobs were sold; and provincial nominations were not checked. While Later Han did develop a true bureaucracy, it was not the bureaucracy of merit and learning envisioned by the Confucianists. One of Kuang-wu's first moves had been to appoint learned men to high posts and to revive and protect the civil service system. By the second century the system was degenerate. The national university was no longer a true teaching institution but a cram school for the examinations. Students came to make the right connections while they pretended to study deadly dull, long-winded, and involved explications of single phrases from the Classics.

Despite their enjoyment of wealth and peace, the scholars formed a separate group, for they felt menaced in their ancient prerogative of directing public affairs. To them the situation was intolerable. Everything sacred was breaking down—Confucian usage, the traditional social order and their place in it. Above all, they hated the eunuchs, for as one of them told the emperor at the end of the second century, "All the Empire would eat the flesh of the eunuchs if they could, and yet, Sire, you respect them as if they were created your parents."* (He was removed from office, imprisoned, and executed.) The irony of this is that while the political life of Later Han was breaking down, the secluded palace had no idea of what was going on—nor, really, did the eunuchs. As power and prestige slipped slowly from the hands of the scholars, there was a corresponding increase of misery in the countryside and a return to feudalization, as seen

* C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, trans., *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Rutland: Tuttle, 1959), Vol. I, p. 17.

in the growth of large family estates. These great family cliques, at the peak of their power and prosperity, paid little attention to such warnings as this:

> You, Noble Sir, are now irresponsible, wanting to exhaust the people in the service of your pleasures—you forget that their hatred becomes a mass vendetta.
>
> You would exhaust commodities in inflating your arrogance—suddenly the underdog rebels and creates misery.
>
> It is by water that a boat is borne up, by water also that it it capsized.
>
> Solid ice is forming when frost is on one's shoes; an eight foot tree springs from a sapling.*

In 165 open strife broke out among the various political factions. The Confucians began a strenuous campaign against what they considered the baneful influences of the eunuchs. The following year they formed the League of the Literati, composed of the older powerful families and scholars, which attacked the eunuchs with a constant stream of remonstrances, memorials, and petitions. The attack, because of the bad conditions of the countryside and capital, enjoyed widespread support among provincial officials and the minor officials in the governmental bureaus, and students at the imperial university, who numbered at this time perhaps thirty thousand, also joined in.

The tactics of the League initially forced eunuchs to resign and in some cases led to suicide or execution. However, in 166, the same year the League was formed, the eunuchs struck back savagely. The leaders of the literati were dismissed from office, imprisoned, or even executed. An amnesty was declared for the eunuchs previously charged, and the remaining literati were banished from the capital to their homes in the provinces, where they would have no influence, and deprived for life of office, income, and prestige. These severe penalties inspired a counter-attack on the part of the literati, who after the emperor's death in 167 plotted with the empress regent to exterminate the eunuchs. Confucian scholars were appointed to key positions in preparation for the destruction, but the empress temporized, the

* Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

plan leaked out, and the eunuchs, to forestall the disaster, struck first. In 167–168 they engineered a palace revolution and led an inquisition against the literati. Members of the League were again proscribed, arrested, condemned, and executed. Founders of the League and their relatives to the fifth degree were prohibited from holding any government post. The eunuch triumph was complete but short-lived, because the government was paralyzed and the countryside, driven to extremes by taxes, corvée, famine, and slavery, had turned to local banditry and rebellion and was ready to explode.

[18]

The Disintegration of the Han State and Empire

THE YELLOW TURBANS' REVOLT

From 90 A.D. all emperors had started their reigns as youngsters, which guaranteed a series of powerful dowager empresses and their relations. Therefore, up to 168 A.D. the struggle for power had been pretty much a palace rivalry between great families. But the triumph of the eunuchs in the period 165–168 A.D. and the consequent demoralization of government extended the contest for power to the entire empire and paved the way for that general rebellion that the scholar class had sensed was coming. We know little of the economic conditions of the Later Han dynasty, but they were bad enough to have led, in 184, to a peasant revolt. This was savagely repressed but was merely the first of a series of rebellions between 184 and 193 A.D., so widespread as to make them a civil war. By the latter date the Later Han dynasty was dead, although it was not finally buried until 220 A.D.

In light of the government's failure to alleviate the problems of the farmers, it is easy to understand why, beginning in 180, the

Chinese peasantry formed into secret, desperate brotherhoods. Why they should have been Taoist in doctrine—why the revolt of 184 should have had intimate connections with a belief traditionally unconcerned with matters of government or society—is in itself an indication of certain deep intellectual and social changes in the first two centuries A.D. Taoism emerged in the second century as a new organized way of faith that seemed to fill the great popular hunger for a religion instead of an ethic. It still clung to its magical rites and trappings, but it now promised salvation through these. A clergy emerged that held meetings, did penance, and performed works of mercy and charity in the villages and farmlands. It is little wonder that this new religion, which promised, if not a golden age, at least a decent, bearable life on this earth, should become the bond among the miserable, leading to millennial sects.

Floods, famines, pestilence, all announced that the heavenly mandate had been lost, according to the Confucians. The popular response to this belief found expression in Taoism. Taoists, for example, called attention to a woman of the Huang (Yellow) family who had been transformed into a caterpillar, signaling that earth, symbolized by yellow, would be replacing the azure of Han. A new cyclical year would begin in 184, and it was widely believed that Han would end then. Everywhere persons wrote the characters for the year in white clay, even on official residences and on temple walls in the capital itself. Popular opinion was polarized in the 170's and 180's by a succession of natural disasters: epidemics in 173, 179, and 182; droughts in 176, 177, 182, and 183; floods in 175. The peasantry was nearly destroyed, disorder increased, and the insecure populace turned to anyone who could help them. Chang Chueh, an itinerate medicine man, emerged as their leader. He claimed to have discovered a remedy for the epidemics and elaborated a doctrine called the Way of the Great Peace, replete with Taoist mythology, signs, and magic symbols. It promised immortality for believers who fell in battle on its behalf, considered sickness a greater crime than evil-doing, and made use of public confessions and repentance. Punishment was applied only after a third wrong-doing, for it was held that a person suffered a natural retribution on the first two occasions

in the form of sickness. The movement was called Yellow Turbans, after the yellow kerchiefs worn as a means of identification in battle. Over a ten-year period the movement grew with astonishing success, until by 184 it numbered more than 360,000 persons in eight provinces. On April 4, 184, Chang Chueh had agreed to stage a general revolt against Han, but the plan was discovered and the participants supressed. Chang Chueh, who escaped, then proceeded to organize his mass of provincial followers, with the result that all of China rose up in revolt. The court was dismayed at the degree of popular enthusiasm and again instigated a savage repression, during which more than 500,000 died. Official histories, obviously exaggerating the savagery, report that in the last battle more than 100,000 corpses were stacked up and covered with dirt, forming a mound so high that the capital Loyang could be seen from its summit.

The effects on the country were catastrophic. In an attempt to meet the emergency, enormous armies were mobilized and great power concentrated in the hands of the generals. The eunuchs, the aristocrat-generals, and the literati feuded incessantly, openly interfering with the struggle against the Turbans. Fiscal corruption and official jealousies undermined the efforts of the government, and in some cases eunuchs were suspected of taking bribes from the rebels and informing on the government's moves. The opportunity for the scholars and magnates to strike at the eunuchs came in 189. The emperor had died without an heir, and the eunuchs opposed the appointment of a prince. The empress temporized, her brother was assassinated, and Yüan Shao took the opportunity to slaughter the eunuchs as well, forcing the new emperor to abdicate. These events only accelerated the disorder and ultimately set in motion a civil war. This struggle lasted more than a generation and "transformed China from a powerful empire into a great cemetery."* From now on the way was open for adventurers, roughnecks, and mercenaries. Free corps, men without faith or law, bandit peasants, declassed intellectuals, controlled the land for the next thirty years.

* E. Balazs, *"La Crise Sociale et la Philosophie Politique à la Fin des Han," T'oung Pao,* 39 (1949), p. 90.

THE THREE KINGDOMS

It was not the government but the great landed families and the military, led by the generals Ts'ao-ts'ao and Tung-cho, who put down the Yellow Turbans. Tung-cho, the praetorian, having put down the rebellion, himself rebelled in 189 against the dynasty, burnt Loyang, and moved his capital to Chang-an, where he was murdered a year later by his own adopted son. The dynasty still existed in that there was an emperor and a court, but the state and empire were fragmenting rapidly. Local autarchy and local defense by locally powerful men were the only guarantees of order; farmland was abandoned in North China and seized by armed landlords who could defend it; beginning in the third century there was a gradual impoverishment and loss of population (between 157 A.D. and 280 A.D. the census shows an astounding drop of forty million people), and during the third century the barbarians began to take over North China.

In 184 a special barbarian corps of the Yüeh-chih of the Kokonor region mutinied at their camp in the Ordos and were joined by other tribes. Fired by the recent Yellow Turban rebellion, they moved across the upper valley of the Yellow River and into the Wei valley, where they threatened Chang-an. Not until late 185 A.D. were the Chinese able to check them and turn them back. But in 188 A.D. they returned, and despite terrible losses in 189 A.D. they remained in the west. In 195 A.D. the dynasty regained control over its own prefectures west of the Yellow River, but even then it reasserted its authority only in alliance with other nomads. The Yüeh-chih were finally broken in 211 A.D. and then by the founder of a new dynasty, Ts'ao-ts'ao.

Ts'ao-ts'ao, one of the local commanders instrumental in crushing the Yellow Turbans, was an incarnation of the new type of men who dominated China by the third century. He was one of the greatest war lords in Chinese history, a poet of renown, a high-liver, and one of the inspirations for the great novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He could say, when he murdered the wrong man, "I would rather betray the whole world than let the world betray me." As a general he relied heavily on barbarian troops, whom he settled within China (Shansi); as lord protector,

in 196, he was in effect overseer of the last rites of the Han dynasty.

Ts'ao-ts'ao was a brilliant figure in an age of turmoil. A proverb described him: "In times of peace, a vile bandit; in a world of turmoil, a heroic leader." His enemies and his admirers agreed that his was a complex personality of manifold contradictions—cunning and unscrupulous but also witty, accomplished, and versatile. An expert strategist and stronged-willed commander, he knew how to gather about him the best men of the times. He was to his enemies a Machiavellian usurper of astonishing cleverness; to his friends, a wise man, satirist, and poet. He understood perfectly what was going on, for as his close adviser Chung-ch'ang wrote, "Everything collapses and falls apart, and one day the dynasty is no more."* He dominated the Yellow River basin from 196 to his death in 220.

With Ts'ao-ts'ao's end came the final breakdown. China, already bled for generations by war and revolution, her wealth vanished, her population half gone, now split into three states, and over three centuries of civil war and disunion began.

When Ts'ao-ts'ao became master of China north of the Yangtze (and including the valley of that river), two other men set up rules of their own. These were Liu-pei and Sun-ch'üan who, with Ts'ao-ts'ao, are the three pretenders whose exploits form the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Liu-pei, a freebooter but a legitimate descendant of the imperial Han and a sort of Chinese Bonnie Prince Charles, retired to the fortress massif of Szechuan and set up the state of Shu-Han (capital at Chang Tu). Sun-ch'üan became Lord of Wu, the lands of the lower Yangtze and the south, with his capital at Nanking (first at Wuchang). It is interesting to note that Chinese history and romance treat the adventurer Liu-pei as legitimate, despite the disappearance of Shu-Han in 265, thus emphasizing the importance attached to the continuity of legitimate rule. This concern with legitimacy may later have prompted Ts'ao-pei, the son of Ts'ao-ts'ao, to force the last Han emperor to renounce the throne

* R. Grousset, *Chinese Art and Culture* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1959), p. 114.

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and turn it over to him as first emperor of the Wei dynasty, with his capital at Loyang.

The three satrapies of Ts'ao-ts'ao, Liu-pei, and Sun-ch'üan represent, in part, the successful Sinicization of "outer" areas during the Han epoch. The military forces that had operated in the field during these wars had represented, in large part, recently or partly acculturated areas, and two of the successor kingdoms, Szechuan and the Yangtze delta, were former "outside" areas. The three states were also economically autonomous. The Ts'ao held the old populous north and northwest areas of Honan and Shensi; the Shu-Han king held prosperous West China, including the roads to India and Tibet; and the Wu king held the rich lower Yangtze region, continuing the trade with Southeast Asia.

Ts'ao-pei's dynasty was short, overthrown in 265 by the Ssu-ma family, chief aides to the Ts'ao, after they had seized the state of Shu-Han on behalf of their masters. In 280 the Ssu-ma succeeded in capturing the southern state of Wu, and in that year China was united nominally under a dynasty that the Ssu-ma chose to call the Chin. This was but a brief union, because the first Ssu-ma had, by dividing his patrimony among twenty-five sons, irreparably weakened China. The Sinicized tribes of the Ordos, watching this drama of the Three Kingdoms, saw no reason why they should not share in the spoils and set themselves up as the rulers of China. They invaded China in force in 307, claiming legitimacy by virtue of the dubious relationship of one of their leaders with a Han notable.

Nothing could stop them. In 311 Loyang, a magnificent city of well over half a million, "the blinds of whose Palace buildings were of mother-of-pearl and at sunset flashed with a dazzling radiance," was sacked and burnt to the ground. Contemporary accounts say that the city of Chang-an, also sacked in 311, was completely depopulated, so that no more than a hundred families lived there, and weeds and thorns grew in the city streets where once had ruled the great Ch'in and Han emperors. So ended the Chinese domination of the north.

[19]

The Era of Disunion and Union

THE AGE OF DISUNION

Not until 589 A.D. was China to again be reunited. The north became a battleground for tribal dynasties, a swirl of transient barbarians revolving around an enduring core of Chinese institutions and traditions, each group setting up its brief military state. But the invaders and rulers of the north were far from anti-Chinese. Settled for centuries on the Chinese periphery, they had long adopted Chinese ways, attracted Chinese immigrants, intermarried with Chinese. While they came to have a lasting effect on Chinese military and economic institutions, they were simply unable to rule established agricultural areas, and their wars ruined the cities and rich farmlands of North China. The impermanence of their rule can be seen in the fact that from 316 to 384 there were sixteen different "states" in the north of China.

Then in 386 the T'o Pa Turks arrived. They came as conquerors but, unlike their immediate predecessors, they tended to let Chinese administer the realm. In 494 they moved their capital from Shansi to rebuild Loyang. The T'o Pa brought peace and

order, protected North China from the steppes, and encouraged both Buddhism and Confucianism. They called themselves the Northern Wei dynasty, and they held the north until 534 A.D., when the tribe split into an eastern and a western faction, the eastern Wei in Honan and the western Wei at Chang-an. Each of these Wei states had three succeeding dynasties, of which the only noteworthy ones were Northern Chi (550–577), which had seven rulers in twenty-eight years, and Northern Chou (557–581). Then in 581 Yang Chien brought first North and then South China under a single rule.

The conquerors of North China, faced by the choice of ruling the territory as tribal conquest states or becoming the ruling class of the settled agricultural land and peasantry, thus sharing power with a Chinese bureaucracy and divesting themselves of much of their old traditions, opted for Sinicizing themselves. Meanwhile, the North Chinese who had fled south of the Yellow River had to colonize that area, learn rice culture, set up a government for themselves, and maintain the institutions of Han culture and civilization.

The main direction of the southward migration (which had been going on since the first century B.C., coming to a head during the collapse in the third and fourth centuries A.D.) was from the Yellow to the Yangtze and West rivers and the river basins of Southwest China, even extending into Annam. In the third century, wars and famines drove peasants and landlords, merchants and scholars to the south and southwest. It is well to remember that for many centuries the Han Chinese had been edging southward from their homelands, and that the horrors of the Later Han period merely intensified and magnified this movement. Despite the rigors of climate, malaria, and the hostility of the southern tribes, the lands to the south had always been highly regarded for their great fertility and the heavy yield of rice.

When it abandoned the north in 311, the Chin dynasty retreated to the Yangtze River, where for about a century, it ruled the south from Nanking (316–419). It then gave way to a succession of five dynasties in the years from 420 to 587, which may be summarized as follows:

The Liu Sung dynasty, 420–477 (eight rulers in fifty-nine years)
The Southern Ch'i dynasty, 479–501 (seven rulers in twenty-three years)
The Liang dynasty, 502–556 (one ruler in fifty-four years)
The Ch'en dynasty, 557–587 (five rulers in thirty-two years)

While the political successions and turmoils in the south are no more interesting to the general reader than the more frequent and varied ones of the north, it was the southern dynasties that, regarding themselves as the legitimate heirs of Han, nourished a rich Confucian civilization, which in turn gave rise to meditative Buddhism. In the ebb and flow of their dominion they Sincized the south (although to this day some areas remain basically non-Chinese). In both north and south throughout this age, interspersed with the many wars and invasions, were long periods of peace and prosperity. Thus, ancient institutions survived and especially the old system of education as a basis for administration, although this education was most often taught privately. The Chinese language remained the vehicle of government in the north, and throughout China the language and its literary forms were the sources of culture and learning for all educated men, regardless of ethnic origin.

In both north and south the economic and social problems of the age remain shadowy for the historian, although there is some evidence of changes that doubtlessly affected the economy: money went out of circulation, property was abused, farms were abandoned and converted into grazing lands. The distinctions between ruler and commoner were drawn far more sharply than ever before. In the north this was due to the presence of non-Chinese rulers, who brought with them their own traditions of birth and nobility, and in the south to the absolute domination of the proprietors who revived hereditary rights. With the end of central government, the unprotected farmer had either to abandon his land or to come under the protection of locally powerful men. Although attempts were made to protect the farmers by establishing local garrisons of farmer-soldiers or assigning state

lands to the individual, no single state lasted long enough to make any system of protection permanent.

While there was a plurality of cultures in the old North China heartland, the dominant strain was Chinese, thus forming an enduring base for reunification and recentralization. The Turks and Mongol invaders had never been large in number; their domination was military and political only. By orders of their own leaders, especially the T'o-pa, they had assimilated Chinese language, dress, and custom. The old imperial dynasty was kept alive, at least in name, for every inheritor took the title of emperor and regarded contenders as usurpers. The leading alien houses intermarried with aristocratic Chinese, and at the highest level there remained for centuries great Turko-Tatar-Chinese families. Yang Chien, who was to restore the Chinese state and empire, was husband to a Turkish noblewoman, and his dynasty was ethnically partly Turkish, as was that of his successors the T'ang.

THE SUI ERA

Yang Chien was born in 541, the son of an official of Northern Wei, and brought up in a predominantly Buddhist environment. Rising swiftly in the service of the Northern Chou dynasty, he was at the age of thirty-six a ministerial official with powerful connections. In 578 a tyrant, Emperor Pin, succeeded to the rule of Northern Chou. He died swiftly and mysteriously, and under murky circumstances Yang Chien became regent and in 581, having defeated rival forces, ascended the throne as the first emperor of the Sui dynasty. The capital of the new dynasty was at Chang-an during the remainder of Yang Chien's life, to 605, and then was moved to Loyang by his son, the Emperor Yang Ti.

Although he was a suspicious man, capable of great rages, Yang Chien was nevertheless eminently practical and knew what he faced in reforging a unitary state. To this end he skillfully used every ideology—Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. He wished to create the widest possible sense of participation in the newly unified state. While the Sui dynasty was short-lived, it is upon its reforms and reconstruction that the greatness of the later T'ang and Sung eras rests. The major achievements of Sui were, first (under Yang Chien), military unification of China and the re-

establishment of the empire, and second (under Yang Chien's son, Emperor Yang Ti), the unification of the political north and the productive south through the construction of a great waterway system linking the Yellow and Yangtze rivers.

The cost of this enormous engineering task in money and especially in forced labor, plus the wanton extravagances of Yang Ti, knelled the end of the dynasty. By wrecking the prosperity created by his father, Yang Ti lost the support of both his people and his officials. The last straw was the disastrous Sui wars with the Turks and Koreans. The enormously powerful Turks threatened Chinese access to Central Asia, and from 581 to 615 the Chinese dealt with them largely through intrigue designed to keep them separate and fighting each other. But in 615 the Turks united and cut off Yang Ti while he was on campaign in the Ordos. He was saved by the young commander Li Shih-min, but he was next faced with a revolt and retired to Yang-chou (modern Chiangtu) in the south. There, in 618, he was assassinated in a rising led by the very commander who had rescued him. A year earlier Li Shih-min had taken Chang-an (with the aid of Turkish allies) and then installed his father, Li Yuan, as first emperor of the T'ang dynasty. In 627 Li Shih-min succeeded to the throne as Emperor T'ai-tsung, and the greatest age in Chinese history opened.

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The Mind and Spirit of Later Han

THE HISTORIANS

Onomakritos, the Greek who scouted the sea route from the Persian Gulf to India for Alexander the Great, was once trying to elicit some idea of Hindu thought through an interpreter in a conversation with a Hindu fakir. The fakir said that "trying to explain philosophy through an interpreter is like expecting water to flow pure through mud." This applies equally to any attempt to explain today the overriding intellectual and religious concerns of the first three centuries A.D. in China, even though much of the philosophical and religious thought was concerned with man on earth and most if not all of the ethical thought was closely related to human experience and institutions. The bulk of secular matters was recorded by educated, carefully trained men who had an end in view, and their discourse is clear. If the Chou were a people who liked to write books, the Han were a people who liked to write books about history, although the greatest ornament of their scholarship was the shaping of the Chinese language.

The attention to history came naturally from the overriding

interest of the governing class in the past and in themselves. The written words of the past were the foundation of their traditional order. The Classics, as possessed by Han scholars, were treated as history as well as unshakable repositories of truths. The written histories were moralistic rather than interpretive, composed by and large of comprehensive dynastic annals that contained implicit warnings. The Taoists, aware of the mutability of human affairs but convinced that recording them was as ridiculous as striving against them, left the art of history to the Confucianist. The pre-Han historian—and indeed the Han historian—was not a professional. He was (with a few exceptions) a literate man occupying an official position.

> [He] had charge of Heaven's time and prognostications by the heavenly bodies. When a year was about to end, he memorialized the calendar for the new year. When there was to be the matter of a state sacrifice, burial or marriage, he was in charge of memorializing the lucky days, together with the festivals and lucky times for each season and its tabooed matters. Whenever the state had an auspicious response [from the divinations] or a visitation or a prodigy, his duty was to record it.*

The Han historians had at hand a prodigious quantity of documents, and in assessing and distilling them, these pioneers were both making history and reflecting it. There is always at work an interaction between historical belief and historical development. The whole history of China, as it was to be expressed through the generalities of generations of official historians, was to exert itself continuously on contemporary historians and on Chinese thought. The historiography of China started out in Han as the preserve of the governing class. It was the source of their education, and therefore it had the rhetorical aim of persuading the reader to accept the historical judgment of one group. Most Chinese were sub-political, outside the scope of history and immune to the lapidary prose turned for the delectation of scholars only. These histories, upon which we depend so heavily, were also limited in subect matter. Our vision of China is confined

* H. H. Dubs, "History and Historians Under the Han," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (February 1961), p. 213.

to their vision. Nevertheless, the histories are magnificent, a monument to the ruling class. Balazs sums it up brilliantly:

> Everything is done there by scholar-officials who play all the parts. Only very seldom do we meet on the margin of this closed bureaucratic universe intruders from the outer world; peasants as taxpayers or villains, i.e., rebels, merchants as taxpayers or carriers of corruption, artisans appear almost never. No representative of these classes is a living person, almost all are mere accessories: they are never subjects but only objects of the actions and doings of the bureaucrats.*

That is to say, outside of what we know from these histories, What really went on in China? On the other hand, since they were written by scholars for scholars, and since they used as sources the imperial archives and the massive files that accumulated in every section of the bureaucracy, these histories are great encyclopedic guides to administration and government, written in most cases by political realists.

However, their concepts of causality were bounded by their Confucian philosophy; the greatest historian of them all, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, said:

> I have inquired into and examined the conduct of affairs and I have sought out the fundamental principles of rise and fall, of success and failure.†

This was not a matter of personal morality. The duty of the Han historian was to get at the facts, and although he could make his own judgments, he could not let himself be swayed by personal prejudices. But he was equally obliged to work within the traditions and conceptual framework of the Classics, which contained unchallengeable verities and moral principles of immutable significance for every temporal event. There is no better illustration of the authoritarian tendency of thought in China. Something quoted from the past and from a great teacher was accepted as truth. History was an appeal to authority. This is demonstrated

* E. Balazs, "The Birth of Capitalism in China," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (August 1960), p. 202.

† E. Chavannes, *Les Memories Historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (Paris: Lerous, 1895–1905), Vol. I, p. ccxxxvii.

in the case of Wang Ch'ung (29–97 A.D.), whose critical writings in history and philosophy were regarded as outside the mainstream of the thought of his age since he was skeptical of both superstitious tradition and intellectual authority.

Literary canons were also fixed by the Han historians. This came about through the work of Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145?–90? B.C.), in the view of many the author of one of the greatest histories ever written. He was the son of Ssu-ma T'an, grand astrologer to Han Wu Ti. Although he succeeded to his father's post, he was basically an archivist whose official duties carried him widely throughout China, including the far western frontier. He had the time, the training, the opportunity, and the desire to create a "great literary work." He also had the courage, as this event proved: he was the servant of a willful autocrat, but nevertheless he was the only one at court to protest to the emperor at the shabby treatment given Li Ling. The emperor, in a fit of rage, had him emasculated. Despite this, he continued at court as imperial private secretary in order to continue his history.

The resultant work, the *Shih chi* (Historical Records), became the model for history-writing in China. Ranging from the earliest times to the lifetime of the author (the chapter on the reign of Han Wu Ti was expurgated and is still missing), it went far beyond the methods of earlier histories, which were mere chronicles of events. Although Ssu-ma Ch'ien does not provide the sources he used in writing the history preceding his own times, by passing on to us in the body of his text much archival material that is now lost, he preserved enormous quantities of documentary history. In dealing with his own times, he compiled voluminous essays on many aspects of government, on finance, trade, administration, military campaigns, etc. The total work, although somewhat dull, is a well-organized mine of information on the dynasty, and to be just, it is also a history of great proportions.

The notable historian of the Later Han was Pan Ku. His *Han shu* (Documents of Han) was restricted to one dynasty, and like the *Shih chi* was not an official history. Subsequently Pan Ku was commissioned to write a history of the founding of the Later Han Dynasty, which marks the beginning of the practice for each dynasty to appoint official historians. The official

histories that followed Pan Ku's were also those of a single dynasty, written from its records by the scholars of the succeeding dynasty and in the same form as the *Han shu,* which was arranged in the following manner: first, the annals or basic chronicle of events of the reigns of the dynasty; second, the biographies of important men; third, the monographs on important subjects, such as geography, commerce, rites, etc.; fourth, calendars of genealogies and tables of important matters.

There were also private or unofficial histories, some simply paraphrases of the official histories and some yielding new information. (Only four of the Han histories survive, of which the *Shih chi* and *Han shu* are almost complete). The Chinese method of writing history by setting down copious and verbatim transcriptions of sources has inadvertently preserved enormous amounts of materials that were lost in the original.

Chinese official history also has several other characteristics. Written by officials for officials, it is impersonal and preoccupied with political and administrative subjects; and it is punctilious in its formal distinctions of language. It is, of course, Confucian in its outlook, and for that reason has often been called the "praise and blame" school of history in that it treats of men and events according to the superior/inferior, good/evil, proper/improper ethos of Confucianism. There is not much distinction in these works between history and philosophy, but they make up reliable and honest historiography within the limitations of the subject matter.

It cannot be assumed that men like Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku, despite their erudition, dedication, perception of their own age, and intimate study of the archives, really understood the past as more than a matter of records. Ssu-ma Ch'ien's view is pretty much an uncritical acceptance of his materials, and Pan Ku, in one of his works, assumes that Chou writers worked under the direction of ministerial authorities as he did. The test of history for interest is in the reading, and fragments of some of the histories and a good deal of Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku are available in English translation. But the bulk of official Chinese history is probably beyond the reach of any man. It has been estimated that the twenty-four official dynastic histories of China contain

about forty-five million characters, or the equivalent of 225,000 pages of English text. It would take a learned man thirteen years just to read through them once.

THE CONFUCIANS

Leaving aside the broad field of history, the major preoccupation of Later Han literature concerns itself with the uses of power, the position of the classes and groups wielding power, and of course the status of the literati who wrote these works. The restored dynasty had established a university at Loyang, and great attention was paid to scholars and scholarship. In the first century there were no less than fourteen various schools of interpretation of the Classics, and the university had masters of all the schools. By the middle of the second century the student body was large, for the sons of most officials were obliged to attend. Education was, as usual, a springboard for the thousands of men who would enter the public service. It took eight years of study to master six Classics (the books of *Changes, History, Poetry,* and *Rites,* the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the now lost *Book of Music*). The first two years were spent on two of the Classics, and following a successful examination another two years were spent studying three of the Classics. Then an examination and a two-year period mastering four of the Classics. The final two years were spent on five of the the Classics. The examination the state candidates took at the end of their education was not a literary examination, despite their having been immersed for years in the study of literature, but seems to have consisted of set problems in government and administration. In 178 A.D. a protest against the narrow Confucian curriculum resulted in the establishment of another school where literature, art, and rhetoric were taught. This was protested by the traditional Confucians, who were averse to learning that exceeded the limits of what had been transmitted from the past.

This was reminiscent of their more successful move to block the attempts of Wang Mang to introduce study in astronomy, mathematics, administration and law, and military studies. The Confucianism of Later Han had abandoned in large measure the ethical teachings of the earlier school. It was engrossed in

apocrypha and in prophetic works in alchemy and demonology. Relying heavily on the dogma that the course of nature is deeply affected by the conduct of man, Later Han Confucianism is a syncretism of portents, naturalism, rationality, Taoism, superstition, and textual studies. The idea of a supernatural Heaven, the Later Han exaltation of Heaven, and the concept of predetermination supported the belief that through ritual, sacrifice, and divination Heaven can be in some way understood. The old Chou-Confucian ethic now becomes a vehicle for metaphysics, the founder is venerated, and his veneration becomes a popular cult. The descendants of Confucius were made hereditary nobles in 8 B.C. In the first century the temple in his ancestral home was restored by the emperor, followed by imperial visits. At the court elaborate rituals and sacrifices to Heaven and Earth were prominent, and the Yin and Yang cult was prominent. Speculative though this cult was in heavenly matters, it never overlooked the political and social realities.

The official cult of the Later Han Confucianism was essentially a compromise between a number of interpretations—great variation being tolerated as long as each cult remained subordinate and amenable to the political and social institutions of the empire. Since the empire was a monopoly, it persecuted organizations that ran counter to state interests, but the broadest kind of toleration in religion was practiced. In Later Han almost any kind of tribal or local religious customs were untouched so long as they did not interfere with administration. But the breakup of the Han empire released critical attacks against the Classics, against custom, and against Confucianism and its cult. The cult had been dependent upon the scholar class, and this class had obviously failed to stem the disasters of the empire.

To the Western mind, used to conceiving of religion in terms of organization, hierarchies, liturgies, and martyrs, it is perhaps more comprehensible to think of Confucianism as a nexus of cults, with a venerated founder but without the emotional connotations we normally associate with revealed religion. This national cult, whose great patrons were the scholars, whose orthodox texts were carved into stone (175 A.D.), and whose head was vicar of Heaven, was operable only in a stable society. After Chinese society was

shattered by the downfall of Han, in the Three Kingdoms period, Taoism and Buddhism began their period of ascendency.

THE TAOISTS

In the first centuries of the Christian era a new Taoism arose. The Tao, so elusive to the thinkers of the past, became a personal god, while teachers of Taoism, who had for centuries called themselves the "true men" (for they alone could evoke and control the forces of nature), became clerics in a hierarchy of masters and adepts. They claimed skill at divinations, potions, and elixirs and formed spiritual colonies whose members attempted to achieve immortality through breathing exercises, vegetarianism, and odd sexual practices. This tremendous separation of the new Taoism from the thought of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu is clearly seen in the organization of a kind of church with a liturgy, a hierarchy, and a pantheon of gods. But not all forms of the new Taoism were institutionalized. Many intellectuals turned to it for the study of its ancient texts and to exercise their minds on something besides the arid homilies and shrewd politics of the Confucian schools. Actually the growing spread of Taoism might be attributed to the fact that the old Taoist belief that equated government with evil had proven itself out in experience. Therefore the new Taoism of the first four centuries was a refuge and a salvation for men of various intellects.

Its "popes," "churches," "hells," and "heavens," its orders of priests and priestesses, its rites and ceremonies, and its fierce independence from the world of men, war, and politics served as an organized sanctuary for those helpless in the face of the disasters of the age. Its powerful organization and financial resources were shields for those who opposed the state—generally members of the upper class, either men out of power or those who sought to preserve some vestige of tradition. The masses, divorced always from government and knowing only its excesses, found in the soothsayers and priests their panacea. And Taoism also welcomed those simply fleeing the world and those who found its naturalism intellectually attractive—the latter being the forerunners of the great naturalistic poets and painters of later dynasties.

Unfortunately the same stimulus was not given to science,

although Taoism carried the seeds of scientific development. While the Taoist alchemists and herbalists were true precursors of chemistry and medicine, the scorn of the educated for all save the romantic aspects of Taoist teaching aborted the development of science by leaving its practice in the hands of lowborn "magicians." This was a pity, for by and large the Taoists had played an important part in the development of fundamental ideas as to process and development in nature. Their approach put nothing beyond the bounds of legitimate inquiry. They were keen to observe and eager to learn from nature, but their investigations were confined by their belief that original creation was unknowable and that, although there were laws of nature and of life, they too were unknowable.

SCIENCE AND SPECULATION

The Taoists were by no means alone as observers of the universe around them. From antiquity Chinese of all orthodoxies and heterodoxies had speculated, often correctly, on the nature of time, energy, and matter. The Chinese had only one story about creation: in the beginning there was an egglike mass, which divided and formed slowly into Heaven and Earth, and in this birth there was created the demiurge Pan Ku, from whose breath and body there came all the natural features of the earth and the skies, while from the lice of his body came men.

In Shang times, as we have seen, the needs of agriculture and statecraft gave a leading place to astronomy and mathematics. From old star catalogues, calendars, and astronomical texts it is clear that by the Han epoch both mathematics and cosmology were very good indeed. The Chinese early knew positional value, used large numbers, and worked out rules for the measurement of areas and for proportions and ratios. Pi had been calculated as 3.154, the formula for the segment of a circle was known, and heights and distances were calculated by triangulation. Artificial numbers, simultaneous linear equations, and third-degree equations were also worked. Algebra was written out in words and not in symbols.

Han man knew the skies well. He had behind him the observations and records of more than a millennium. The oldest known

record of a nova is on an oracle bone dated about the thirteenth century B.C. "On the seventh day of the month . . . a great new star appeared in company with Antares." Chinese astronomers worked from stars that never rise and set (the pole star and the circumpolar stars), since these gave a better base of observation than the rising and setting stars used in Near Eastern practice. The correct cause of eclipses had been established; sunspots were observed; and time itself was divided and measured thirteen centuries before this was done in Europe—that is, not only were the divisions of the day established, but also the months and seasons, the equinoxes, the phases of the moon, and the solstices; and the solar year was calculated at 365.25 days.

The most pervasive theory of the origin and processes of the universe was one best seen in Tung Chung-shu's cosmic order of anomalies. Here the whole structure of the universe is a unity, manifested through the five elements of earth, fire, water, metal and wood, and through the moods of the seasons. This is well ahead of the Aristotelian view that the heavenly bodies must be of a different matter than the earth and must therefore follow their own laws, and it is very close to and still further ahead of the work of Galileo, who found that the earth and the heavenly bodies are much alike and obey the same laws. According to the Confucian view, this unified order signified a rational intelligence at work, which was itself good but which set into operation both good and evil. As the evil and the good recede and advance, so man knows through such manifestations of nature the immediate impulse of the universe and must arrange his affairs accordingly.

This was a good and interesting hypothesis, for "it was a picture of an extremely and precisely ordered universe in which things 'fitted' so exactly that you could not insert a hair between them' . . . But it was a universe in which this organization came about, not because of fiats issued by angels attendant; not because of the physical clash of innumerable billiard balls in which the motion of one was the physical cause of the impulsion of the other. It was an ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer; it was like the spontaneous yet ordered, in the sense of patterned movements of dancers in a country dance of figures, none of whom are bound by law to do what they do, nor yet pushed by

others coming from behind, but co-operate in a voluntary harmony of wills."* But it failed to become a springboard for further development of scientific thought. It is important to remember that, in contrast to the circumstances of the Western scientific renaissance, in China there was no separation between science and the humanities. (It is also important to remember that Chinese scientific thought and technical development in many areas were equal to if not ahead of the West until roughly the twelfth century.) In the West the job of the scientific scholar had once been to translate and interpret the authoritative body of Greek knowledge, and particularly the astronomical knowledge of Ptolemy contained in the great *Almagest*. One consulted the Greeks and Arabs rather than the stars. This ended when Copernicus questioned Ptolemaic astronomy and sought for answers in other authorities. Then came Tycho Brahe's direct and painstaking observations of the stars, and finally the old cosmos was shattered by Kepler's mathematics, which separated the universe from man once and for all. It was primarily the development of optical instruments that moved Western man out of the limits of the old knowledge. Perhaps if the telescope (and the microscope) had been developed in China a rejection of the Confucian cosmology would have ensued. As it was, there could be only limited scientific investigation with the use of such tools as the gnomen, the water clock, and the armillary sphere, a large metal ball representing the shape of the heavens and the earth, on which by means of graduations, an equatorial ring and an ecliptic ring, the movements of the sun, moon, and planets could be accurately checked and described.

But let us assume that technology had kept pace with hypothesis. In a society where natural and political science were so closely intertwined, it might still have been impossible to achieve objectivity about the universe. Chinese cosmological speculation that was precise and seeking was invariably smothered in Confucian symbolic correlations, which fitted all natural phenomena into a hierarchy as ordered as human society.

* J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956), Vol. II, pp. 286–287.

The passion for order and hierarchy projected into nature from the Confucian desiderata for human society is understandable. The achievements of European scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought an unfavorable reaction there when the Copernican theories seemed to threaten a chaos among the stars equivalent to the terrestrial chaos of the Reformation. The attack of skeptics like Wang Ch'ung, who believed that the planets came from original vorteces of gases (although the gases were Yin and Yang) and who insisted that locust plagues did not originate in the wickedness of ministers, failed for the simple reason that objections to the use of science for dynastic purposes were viewed as subversive. Therefore, after a certain point Chinese thinking about the universe would only work empirically by inducing its results from observations of society. The very success of Confucianism was enough to inhibit the development of science in China, and the great advances made up to Han times simply petered out in bookishness and in "magic."

BUDDHISM

The introduction of Buddhism into China is shrouded in Buddhist hagiographic and apocryphal literature that had a propagandistic function. Strangely, the first solid historical mention of Buddhism occurs not in western China, where the Central Asian trade routes entered, but in the east at P'eng-ch'eng. Here, in 65 A.D., lived Liu-ying, the king of Ch'u and son of Emperor Kuang-wu, who, in the words of the official history, "recites the subtle words of Huang Ti and Lao-tzu and who respectfully performs the gentle sacrifices to the Buddha. After three months of purification and fasting, he has made a solemn vow with the spirits." This description, as well as the fact that Liu-ying was deeply interested in the Taoist arts, which were supposed to produce bodily immortality, shows that in its early history Buddhism was closely associated with Taoism, and that it developed as a kind of exotic form of Taoist practices not easily differentiated from those of the Taoist church. The existence of a Buddhist community at P'eng-ch'eng suggests that Buddhism probably entered China perhaps a century before and gradually spread throughout the country. Later, in about 114, Chang-heng wrote

a "Rhyme Prose on the Western Capital [Loyang]" in which he casually mentions a Buddhist term, indicating that by this time Buddhism was fairly common. Around this date, too, the first translation of Buddhist scriptures seems to have been undertaken. According to Buddhist lore, the Indian missionary Dharmaratna translated the Section Sutra in 67 A.D., and while this account is legendary, the Sutra is quoted in a memorial in 166, showing that it was very ancient.

Thus as Confucianism was collapsing as a meaningful guide for men and a debased Taoism was offering instant successes and immortality, Buddhism began to flourish. Chinese intellectuals like Wang-fu (90–165) hated the excesses of their day—the prevarications, venality, extravagance, greed, and harshness. Others, like Tung Chung-ch'ang, felt that only a madman could survive in a world where "all the philosophers are obscure and petty. I should like to set fire to them." Buddhism was a sophisticated but alien answer to the challenges of the deteriorating social order of China. To be intelligible, however, it had to be translated into terms that grew out of the Chinese social and intellectual experience and reflected the Chinese sense of values.

This was a difficult task, for the basic presuppositions of Chinese thought were radically different from those of Buddhism's homeland, India. The Indians were given to detailed and subtle analysis of personality, to an abstract and other-worldly mode of thinking, while the Chinese were characterized by concreteness and externality of feeling. Indians were preoccupied with aeons of time, the cosmic *kalpas*, in which a single day could last 365 earth years, a time infinite in duration in which even moments were beyond human conception. The Chinese had no clear means of reckoning long periods of time but thought in terms of reigns, or the sixty-year cycles, or in sums of these. Larger figures—hundred, thousand, ten-thousand—were used metaphorically to express the totality of a concept; thus, the "hundred philosophers," the "ten-thousand things." Time for the Chinese was a human phenomenon, related to the rhythms of the social order and to the agricultural requirements of an argarian order. It was periodic, regular, and limited. Indian time stretched without limit, and was cyclical, not periodic. It existed *a priori* and without regard to events and change.

The same contrast was true of Indian and Chinese values. Indian ethics were absolute, universal, directed toward the individual without regard to his social status, his family, or any connection with mankind. Chinese ethics started with the family and society. The individual acted in terms of their good; What could individual salvation mean without regard to the family? Other worldly benefits seemed less desirable to the Chinese than the well-being of society. Wealth and pleasure were not considered to be an impediment to the good life, although extravagance was to be avoided because it destroyed balance and harmony.

Thus, at the very outset, the Indian, Parthian, and Khotanese missionaries who came to China were faced with philosophical barriers. Added to these was the practical problem of language. Sanskrit-speaking Indians knew no Chinese and rarely any Central Asian language. Thus translations were made by means of intermediaries. The master recited the text from memory or read it from a copy of the precious Sutra, an intermediary translated it into a Central Asian language, and it was then translated into Chinese by another intermediary. To facilitate the process, the master gave oral commentaries on the meaning and significance of the Sutra, commentaries which often became indistinguishable from the text itself. Pious donors provided the money, "encouragement and help," and added their names in colophons to the work.

In 286 the great Dharmarakśa translated a Buddhist sutra, the "Lotus of the True Doctrine," into Chinese in a fashion that was acceptable to literate Chinese. Dharmarakśa came from a wealthy Tun-huang family, who provided him with a Chinese education. He was a gifted linguist speaking "the thirty-six [i.e., all] languages of Central Asia as well as Sanskrit and Chinese. He wrote some 154 works and contributed more than anyone else, in the view of his biographer, to the conversion of China. The "Bodhisattva of Tun-huang," as he was called in Chang-an, also contributed significantly to the standardization of Buddhist terminology and greatly increased the literalness of translation from the Sanskrit. His difficulty in teaching, and that of those who followed him, is linked to the intractable character of the Chinese script. Unlike an alphabetic script, which can accommodate the

sounds of foreign words with some accuracy, Chinese cannot without at the same time suggesting semantic content. Further, Sanskrit is a highly inflected language with words of many syllables, while Chinese is uninflected and has words of only a few syllables. Words from Sanskrit that were merely rendered with Chinese characters so that their sounds were preserved made long and unwieldy strings of nonsense characters. The alternative was simply to translate the concept by means of a Chinese word. This path proved the most attractive. *Wu-wei,* the "non-assertive action" of the Taoist, becomes, via the *wu,* "non-being" of the Abstruse Learning, the Buddhist Nirvana. Buddhist *śila,* "morality," becomes *hsiao-hsün,* "filial submission." By such translations, many Buddhist concepts were fundamentally altered and made more consonant with Chinese experience. At the same time, the Mahayana, or Greater Vehicle, was becoming the dominant form of Buddhism in China, replacing the more strict and less flexible Hinayana or "Lesser Vehicle."

During the late third century a Buddhist community was formed of intellectual clerics, some Chinese and some Sinicized foreign monks, who became the creators and propagators of a Buddhism completely Chinese in spirit and vocabulary. By the beginning of the fourth century this intellectual, monkish elite had established significant contacts with the cultured upper classes from which the Confucian bureaucracy had always come. This was the Buddhism documented in philosophical tracts, in polemics between cultured monks and hostile literati, and in the memorials of government. It was a Buddhism that was increasingly intellectual, moral, and in accord with the Chinese philosophy. Side by side with this was the equally important, but largely undocumented, growth of devotional Buddhism among the masses. Here was a Buddhism that stressed the rewards of the Western Paradise, the endless love of Buddha, the boundless compassion of the Bodhisattvas, who helped the faithful in their sufferings and lightened the weight of their sins, or, as in the Pure Land sect, taught that simply uttering the holy name once, utterly and truly believing, was sufficient to win for the believer a place in Paradise. It was a consolatory force in an age of distress, making no demands save faith, hope, and charity.

Most of the Buddhist monks seem to have come from the masses, for aristocrats rarely wished to abandon their families and take vows. Thus there developed an accommodation in which an aristocrat could remain in his family while following in his life the Five Rules (which forbade killing, taking what is not given, unchastity, falsehood, and intoxicants), observing periods of fastings regularly, and visiting monasteries to pray and burn incense. Devoted members of the laity often attended the monasteries to hear sermons, converse with learned monks, and sometimes assist in translation of religious texts or in other good works. Eventually monks delivered sermons outside the monasteries, being invited to debate among scholars. They sometimes participated in discussions before the emperor himself, and even left the monastery to take positions as advisers in secular matters or official positions in the bureaucracy. Buddhist themes naturally found their way into the intellectual life of all facets of Chinese society, being reflected in the art, literature, and music of the day. Access to the imperial court opened the way to royal support, especially from pious consorts and empresses.

Perhaps the most important personage in development of Buddhism at the close of the fourth century was Tao-an, whose inquiring mind sampled a wide variety of beliefs. Chinese by birth and fully acquainted with the cultural heritage of China's past, he was deeply impressed by the alien character of Buddhism. As a consequence he embarked on a quest to uncover the real meaning of the doctrine and to make that meaning fully accessible to the cultured Chinese gentleman. Under his disciples there developed a genuine Chinese Buddhism.

Buddhism was persecuted officially twice during the Age of Disunion, once in 446 A.D. and again in 574. (There were to be later persecutions.) In addition, it came under constant criticism from both Taoists and Confucianists. Many Chinese scholars disliked it because it was not just alien, it was positively uncivilized, for it stood outside of the age-old Chinese universal world view. Culturally and morally it stood aside from and even denied what every moral man knew was right. It preached celibacy, which was contrary to nature and destructive of the family. It practiced monasticism, which was also destructive of the family.

There was no ceremony of ancestor worship, which was a denial of filial piety. Its adherents begged for a living or lived on donations and offerings, which ran contrary to Chinese ideas on labor productivity. (This last charge became a serious matter as early as the fifth century, when in a poor and despoiled country it was estimated that about one-eighth of the total population were in non-productive monastic communities and hence parasites on a laboring economy.) The other-worldliness of Buddhism, the rich fantasy of the Indian imagination, were also anathema to the empirical, worldly Chinese scholar. Many metaphysical concepts, insofar as they could be grasped in Chinese, were hotly disputed. Both Taoists and Confucianists refused to accept the idea of personal survival after death, deeming such a concept completely contrary to the concept of the universe and the cosmic cycle, where all things have their allotted span. The separate and eternal existence of the soul was held to be false doctrine, for soul and body were inseparable within a natural cycle. Just as bitterly attacked was the concept of the illusion of this world —as illustrated in this remark of the Chan Buddhist Lu Hui-neng to two monks who were discussing whether a flag was moving itself or being moved by the wind: "Neither the flag nor the wind is moving," he said, "there is only a movement within your minds."

To every intellectual and philosophical attack the Buddhists had an answer. To the charge of being inferior they replied that the Buddha himself was a royal person greater than some revered Chinese philosophers, and that on this basis alone his teachings were those of a highly superior man. To the charge of filial unpiety they replied that a part of the Buddhist canon charged the believer with the practice of the greatest solicitude toward his parents; furthermore, not only Buddhist canon but Chinese law made parental consent necessary before one could become a monk or nun. The Buddhists also developed a ceremony in which offerings were made to one's ancestors. In effect, the Confucians were antagonistic to any system of thought save that sanctioned by their own texts, and they were exacerbated by the influence Buddhism came to wield by the sixth century.

The Taoists were against Buddhism (a surprising attitude in

view of the great influence of Taoism on Buddhism), partly because it was favored by the state and the Taoists were old foes of the state, partly because it was alien, and partly because they too had their own metaphysic. As a matter of fact, one Taoist explanation for the development of this new religion was that the Buddha himself was a Taoist immortal, that Buddhism was a pale version of Taoism, which Lao-tzu on a trip to the Indies had created for foreigners.

This opposition was not, in this period, significant. Despite the opposition, during the third and fourth centuries Buddhism in both north and south enjoyed the toleration and protection of government. In the Confucian south it prospered among all classes and it kept its independence from any state control.

The fifth century marked a significant growth of Buddhism and the articulation of a number of different schools. The complex doctrinal and ritual variations need not concern us, but we should note an important divergence in approach between the two poles of Buddhism. Buddhists had long been aware that the doctrine, as received from India, was in two basic forms, Hinayana and Mahayana, and that even within one form there were numerous disagreements among its believers. Hinayana stressed the slow accumulation of knowledge, wisdom, and enlightenment to overcome the ignorance—the evil traces of *karma*—which was the cause of suffering until, perhaps in this life, perhaps in some future life, release (Nirvana) was attained. In this respect it resembled the emphasis that Confucianism, as a frame of mind rather than as a doctrine, had placed on effort, study, and knowledge. In contrast, Mahayana seemed to offer instant salvation, whether through intense belief or through sudden enlightenment, which liberated one from all material bonds. This, in turn, vaguely resembled Taoism, and as a frame of mind was perfectly in harmony with the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Lao-tzu*. Mahayana became fully developed in Chan.

The monastic communities were never able to rid themselves of the imputation of being apart from the Chinese state. The most conspicuous issue was their lack of contribution to the economy. They were responsible for the removal of sizable groups of able-bodied men and women from productive work and from the tax

rolls; great donations of land were piously deeded over to them and became tax free, and enormous sums in contributions were spent on the rich adornment of temples and statues. All of this presaged a serious dislocation of Chinese economic life, and it was for such reasons that a To-pa emperor (urged by a Taoist minister), ordered in 446 a repression of the Buddhists. It never really came about because there were high officials sympathetic to the Buddhists, but from 446 onward to the climax of the savage repressions of the ninth century, the threat of the state hung over Buddhism. Nevertheless, a Buddhist way of thought and code of behavior had already become part of Chinese life.

❁ *RETROSPECT*

The restoration of the Han dynasty is one of the decisive periods of Chinese history, emphasizing deep-rooted patterns of state and society that had been generating for centuries. Among these were the survival ability of the great landed families and the maturation of the principle of legitimacy in rule, although the restored line are only collateral descendants of an emperor who died in 140 B.C. and not direct heirs of the last ruler of the Early Han. Yet within twenty-five years after the death of the first emperor of Later Han, new social and political changes tore apart Han society, thought, and politics, and within a century rebellions began to erupt that were to break up the state and empire. The era is marked by palace intrigues, the increasing seclusion and incapacity of the emperors, the growth of great estates, and the inability of the capital to prevent landlords from abusing land and farmer, agrarian unrest, military aggrandizement, and foreign invasions. After the first century, palace politics alienated the dynasty from its own civil servants and military commanders. For a brief period all factions united against a peasant rebellion, but after a holocaust that was really no victory, the great ecumenical order of Han was gone, internecine struggle began again between the powerful and, from the end of the second century to the middle of the fourth century, China was in

economic ruin and politically unstable. Perhaps the most serious underlying cause was taxation. The *theory* of taxation was based on a distributive system whereby each adult received a fair and fixed land allotment and paid an annual tax on it. This never worked out in *actuality* because there were too many exemptions, especially to officials civil and military and the great estates. It was catastrophic for a state that depended on the land tax to permit or to ignore the fact that more and more productive land was producing less and less revenue. Periodically the decline in tax revenue from the land was noted and expedient measures were taken. Money was cheapened, state trade and industrial monopolies were set up, and merchants and artisans were specially taxed, but none of these measures worked. Had the objects of the special taxes, the merchants and manufacturers, been permitted to flourish—that is, had capitalism been permitted to develop—it may well have rescued and stabilized the state. Tradition and the ruling class were against this, and so capitalism in China remained stunted at its potentially most exploitive stage, and the government continued to eke out its existence from a diminished amount of taxable land.

In 311 A.D. the capital city of Loyang was taken by nomads, and within a few years all North China was lost to the barbarians. Not the dynasty, its generals, its scholars, nor its aristocrats had the will or the ability to stem the tide. Many of the elite and as much of the peasantry as could fled southward, and for three hundred years China was disunited. Alien nomad kingdoms succeeded one another in the north. Colonization of the south brought Sinicization and further establishment and elaboration of Confucian cultures. During these centuries the persistence of a Confucian way of doing things is remarkable. We have already seen its adaptation to new social, political, and military factors, despite the loss of its speculative energy, and the triumph of totally new ways of thought. Most remarkable was the survival of the principle of universalism as represented in an emperor who alone could give proper direction to human affairs.

Out of the debacle came renewed assurance in the traditional system; for the imperial failure was rationalized as the failure of the emperor to appoint capable and virtuous men. Thus

it was not the system but its managers who became the touchstone of post-Han Confucianism. This was to be moderated by new currents of thinking on man and society. For one thing there was the tremendous impact on the individual of Buddhism, whose ultimate contribution was infinite love and compassion hitherto so lacking in Chinese life. For another the Taoists, for all their ecclesiastical organization and interference in secular events, felt themselves confirmed in their old belief that governments were bad and that men had to seek individual solutions in extra-temporal forces. Confucianism, although battered by these centuries, never ceased to state positively that life was worth living.

The collapse of the southern Liang and the northern Wei signaled the beginning of a period of intensified conflict in preparation for reunification of the country. When reunification was accomplished, numerous problems of regionalism existed, not unlike those that existed before the consolidation of Ch'in-Han. The contrasts between the north and south, divided for more than two centuries, were considerable. The north had developed a more austere pattern of life. Food, clothing, and manners were simple. It practiced monogamy, and the extended family was common. Because the north had been under barbarian rule, militaristic virtues were more evident. The more literate and refined south was considered effete. The repository of culture after the literati fled the invading barbarians, it prided itself on its high standards and literary polish and considered the north crude and rough, including its spoken language, which was "like the braying of donkeys or the barking of dogs." It had the virtue of military strength, but no substance, no refinement.

Such attitudes were an impediment to reunification. Similarly, there was no commonly held political or social doctrine to serve the state as a basis for its laws. Confucianism, though prestigious among the literati and educated, meant little to the masses. Virtually all educated men were interested in some Taoist doctrines. Buddhism was the living religion of the masses, and all classes of Chinese were deeply impressed with its values, its attitudes, its doctrines. It was inconceivable that the rigid Confucianism of the Han could be restored. Thus the formation of a

new, unifying state ideology, which would attract the allegiance of the educated and establish the principles of a new bureaucracy, was a major requirement of the Sui dynasty.

Sui ideology combined Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism so that all segments of the population found something desirable in it. The Taoist credo was formally recognized and high honors were bestowed on Lao-tzu, but the organization of the Taoist church was rigidly controlled to prevent any anti-state activity. Honors were also paid to the Sage Confucius, and the political theories of Han Confucianism were reinstated as an instrument of social control and as a foundation for the techniques of government and the bureaucracy. The Confucian intellectual system was discarded because its metaphysics had been discredited. Buddhism, however, was the core of the ideology, since it was the popular religion of the peasantry and enjoyed wide acceptance among the northern and southern elites. It was ecumenical and provided a credible intellectual basis for the emperor as the old Confucian system had done for Han. Thus the Sui Emperor Wen became a universal monarch. But the Sui emperors were as careful to control the Buddhist church as they had been with regard to the Taoist. They recognized the Vinaya sect as patriarch of the Buddhist communities because it had the strictest rules. Further, this sect limited proselytizing and the kinds of economic enterprises in which the clergy might engage. It was thus, from the viewpoint of the emperor, the most desirable form of Buddhism and the one that provided the best opportunity for control while gaining honor and prestige for the government.

A similar interpretation should, according to the historian Arthur Wright, be placed on the numerous monumental enterprises of Sui Yang Ti, which have been roundly condemned by Confucian historians and moralists. He took steps to rehabilitate the Confucian educational system and set up the examination system as a means of curbing the aristocratic families on whom his father had depended, and he opened government service to the scholarly gentry of the south and north. In this way he sought to create a sounder basis for imperial power. His building of an eastern capital at Loyang was also politically motivated and more

than mere megalomania. His building of the Grand Canal, condemned as a senseless folly of unparalleled cost in resources and life, was likewise a sound economic move of important political consequence. It meant that the north and south were linked together by a waterway, unifying their economies and making it possible for the government to tap the vast wealth of the south, as T'ang times would demonstrate. Vainglorious display, megalomaniacal preoccupations, profligate waste, were all that his critics saw. This was their view, too, of his expedition against the barbarians to secure the north and of the rebuilding of the Great Wall.

Yang Ti's unsuccessful Korean expedition, though motivated by sound considerations, proved to be the project that destroyed the country. When he was forced to impose special tax levies, rebellions broke out. The historians say that his personality disintegrated. He became indecisive, gave way to rage, and commissioned extravagant and wasteful projects. Sui crumbled, but T'ang received the benefit of the monumental public works of Yang Ti, much as Han had received the benefits of earlier times. A cumulative linear quality is evident in Chinese history.

PART IV

THE MATURATION OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION 627–1368

[21]

T'ang T'ai-tsung's Empire

THE RESTORED EMPIRE

In 613 a revolt raised against Sui had failed, but another, in 617, succeeded, with the capture of Chang-an. The leader of this revolt, in Shensi, was a seventeen-year-old boy, Li Shih-min, son of Li Yuan, governor of the province, and a grand nephew of Yang Chien, founder of Sui. In 618 the last Sui emperor was persuaded to abdicate and Li Yuan became first emperor of a new dynastic house, the T'ang. At that time he controlled only Shansi. He had to unseat twelve other powerful claimants in China and hold off the Turks, who were delighted at the prospects of a weak and divided China. In each case the military solution was left in the hands of Li Shih-min. From 618–621 he waged a bitter and confused but victorious fight to consolidate North China, ending with the capture of Loyang. From 621–624 he fought to add the south, the upper Yangtze areas, and eastern China to the Li domains.

These successful campaigns demonstrated not only his genius but the incapacities of his vacillating father, his timorous elder brother Li Chen-chang, and his debauched younger brother Li Yuan-chi. His brothers, fearful of his victories, raised one plot after another against his life. Li Shih-min refused to lift his

hand against them until 626, when he was finally convinced that he was in danger of assassination. He attacked his brothers, both of whom were killed in the fray. Two months later Li Yuan abdicated and, at the age of twenty-six, Li Shih-min, posthumously called T'ai-tsung, ascended the throne. His preparation for the throne had been twelve continuous years as a military commander in the field, resulting in victory so complete and a reputation so prodigious that he had no fear of rivals and indeed could rule as he pleased.

His most immediate problem was the Turks, a matter that dominated T'ang foreign and military policy until 690. It took him only six years to conquer China but the remainder of his life to subdue the Turks. This he ultimately did so thoroughly that by the time of his death in 649 he had brought China within sight of being the greatest empire in the world, a position that was achieved within only another fifty years.

The Turks were skilled metal-workers, originating on the slopes of the Altai range, who by the fifth century A.D. dominated the steppes. At the beginning of T'ang they were in three general groupings: The eastern Turks of the Gobi region; the western Turks, who lived on the north of the T'ien-shan range; and the T'u-yu-hun, who dwelt between the K'un-lun and Nan-shan ranges. All were hostile to China and occupied themselves with raids into Chinese territory. T'ai-tsung had to create an armed force powerful enough to beat the Turks and then maneuver them into a battle where they could be destroyed. He refitted and retrained the armies with which the house of Li had unified China. In 629, for the first time in centuries, a Chinese heavy cavalry army passed the Wall and endangered Mongolia. The eastern Turks were maneuvered so as to be caught between T'ai-tsung and the Gobi desert. They suffered a defeat that placed Inner Mongolia from the Wall to the desert under Chinese rule. One hundred thousand Turkish tribesmen were settled in the Ordos despite the protests of Chinese ministers, who recalled the Han mistake of assimilating foreigners.

The western Turks and the T'u-yu-hun remained a danger, roaming at will in the Tarim basin, menacing the caravan trade routes to India as well as the frontiers of Europe and China. In

639 two Chinese army corps set out to reconquer Central Asia and succeeded in crushing the T'u-yu-hun on the edge of the Taklamakan waste. The army corps (with Turkish troops) then moved westward and in 640 took the kingdom of Turfan and installed a Chinese garrison. One by one the great oasis cities were captured—Karashahr in 644, Kucha in 645, and Khotan in 648. The western Turks were defeated near Urumchi in 642 and again near the Issyk Kul in 657. By 660 China was firmly in control of all Turkestan. This was lost in 670, when the four cities were taken by Tibetans, but they were regained in 692. The year of T'ai-tsung's death, 649, marked the furthest advance of the Chinese when an army assisted by forces from Tibet and Nepal established tributary relations with North India and carried an Indian king back to China as prisoner.

Simultaneous with the reconquest of Central Asia, a protectorate was established over Korea. Korea, or rather the three states into which that peninsula was divided at the beginning of T'ang, was no stranger to Chinese influence. The Liao region and the northern quarter of the peninsula had been the Han commandery of Laklang. With the end of Han influence the commandery was occupied by Manchurian tribes, and by Sui times it was a kingdom of sorts, called Korai. To the south lay two independent states, Silla and Paekche. Sui had helped bring on her own ruin by the attempt to restore Chinese dominion in northern Korea, and the lesson of that massive failure was still fresh when T'ai-tsung was confronted by a similar problem. In 642 a noble named Chuan usurped the throne of Korai and began a war against Silla, which called on China for assistance. T'ai-tsung could not refuse to help an ally. A campaign, undertaken by land and sea, started by defeating an army of Korai in the field at Liaoyang (between the Yalu and the Liao rivers), but the severe winter forced the Chinese to withdraw before they could press into the peninsula. Intermittent fighting ended with a truce in 650, by which time T'ai-tsung had died. In 655 Silla again called for help, this time against Paekche, and for the next five years China fought a fruitless series of land campaigns in an effort to break through into the peninsula. Then in 660 an amphibious attack was launched from Shantung across the

Yellow Sea to seize Hsiung Chin, the capital of Paekche. Until 663 Silla and China fought Paekche and her ally, Japan, deep in Korean territory, while the Chinese fought Korai armies north of the peninsula. In 663 China gained the victory over Paekche, and in 667 T'ang armies crossed the Yalu River and ended the war with Korai. China became protector of Korea. Thousands of Korean refugees poured into Japan, bringing with them the arts, philosophies, religion, and learning of China.

The empire was also victorious in southernmost China. After Han, the local Chinese governors in the south had made their areas into hereditary principalities. Sui began the reconquest of the region, and T'ang continued it, advancing as far as the Mekong River, establishing garrisons and collecting taxes but permitting tribal chiefs and local rulers to stay in power as governors of T'ang administrative departments.

T'ANG CHINA AND THE WORLD

In 649, the year of T'ang T'ai-tsung's death, China was master of Manchuria, much of Mongolia and the Tarim basin, and the protector of Korea. The Great Wall was guarded on the north by tribes tributary to T'ang, and the Chinese frontiers ran from Korea westward through Central Asia to the edge of Persia and Tibet and southward to Annam.

It would be a mistake to view the re-establishment of the Chinese empire in terms of pure power. The pacification campaigns opened long-closed routes and brought into being some new ones. Both goods and ideas traversed these routes.

Fresh and secure in her power and with a soundly organized and effective government, T'ang China was open to all who could reach her. The peoples and goods of much of the world were to be seen in her great seaports, and her capital, Chang-an, was a truly cosmopolitan city with only one close rival, Byzantium. Negro slaves from Africa, Moslem traders from the Red Sea, Persian merchants, Turk cavalry officers, Indian scholars, Japanese religious pilgrims, Byzantine agents, Islamic teachers, Zoroastrian masters, Manichean and Nestorian priests, and ships from the Mediterranean, Zanzibar, Ceylon, and Sumatra—all came freely to T'ai-tsung's empire. The influx introduced every-

thing from practical techniques for growing and grinding sugar cane to new Buddhist thought.

It was an age of pilgrims, of whom the greatest was the monk Hsüan-tsang. Disturbed by the gaps in his knowledge of Buddhism, he decided to travel to its sources and consult the masters. In 629 he illegally departed China (having been refused permission to make the journey) and crossed the Gobi alone to the Chinese monastery at Hami. From there he crossed the snow peaks of the T'ien-shan to the camp of the khan of the western Turks, who helped him on his way to Samarkand, and then climbed the Khyber Pass into Kashmir, where he remained for two years as a student in the monkish communities before traveling across India to Assam. He then retraced his steps across India and walked home through the Pamirs, Kashgar, and Khotan. In 645 he re-entered China, having completed one of the greatest journeys ever made. In 671 the pilgrim I-ching took the sea route to India, leaving China in a Persian ship and traveling by way of Annam, Malaya, and Sumatra. Both I-ching and Hsüan-tsang did more than enlarge China's geographical knowledge; they, and especially Hsüan-tsang, were the vehicles for fresh concepts so compelling that they took root despite the opposition of orthodox scholars and ultimately contributed to a new Confucian synthesis.

But if T'ang received she also gave. The diffusion of T'ang Confucianism and of Chinese Buddhism has been held to be analagous to the spread of Roman law and the Christian religion from Rome into Western Europe. Merchants, pilgrims, and embassies easily came to and departed China as well as Chinese governors, civil servants, and military administrators, and all participated in the dissemination of the T'ang ethos. So profound was its influence that when the physical empire came to its end, South China remained Chinese; and the Cantonese still refer to themselves as the "men of T'ang," just as the North Chinese use the term "men of Han." Korea remained a great cultural satellite, more Confucian in many ways than China, and the whole future of Japan was modified by her efforts to emulate T'ang government and culture.

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The Reorganized State

To a great extent T'ai-tsung's organization of government was a refinement of the Han system, with great improvement in structure and definition of function. Ranking immediately below the emperor were the Three Departments: the Imperial Chancellery; the Imperial Secretariat; and the Department of State.

The Imperial Chancellery was charged with the flow of information to the emperor. It submitted reports from officials of both the central and the provincial administrations. The Secretariat drafted and promulgated edicts and kept custody of official documents. The actual operation of government was the function of the Department of State, which comprised the Six Boards: Civil Appointments, Finance, Rites, War, Punishments, and Public Works. The Board of Civil Appointments was charged with the staffing of the civil service bureaucracy, with the conferment of grants within the service, with the assignment of officials to posts within the capital and provinces, and until 736 with the conduct of the examinations. The Board of Finance was charged with the collection of taxes and with supervision of the resources of the land—grain and other products—in which the government was involved. The Board of Rites was concerned with matters of official protocol and etiquette. It arranged the reception of foreign

dignitaries and court ceremonies and functions, and after 736 was in charge of the conduct of the examinations. The Board of War was concerned with the appointment and supervision of military officials, with the defense of the empire, and with the control of the foreign subjects who lived at the frontiers of the empire. The Board of Punishments was responsible for the administration of justice and the initiation of procedures against criminals, thus comprising both the judiciary and the prosecution. The Board of Public Works was concerned with transport of grain, the maintenance and construction of irrigation works—dikes, sluices, canals—and the care of the numerous state buildings.

Outside this structure and given over-all authority was the Censorate, which investigated all officers of the empire. It functioned in three areas of responsibility. Within the court, it could impeach officials guilty of injustice or irregularities in the conduct of their office. Members of the Censorate attended imperial audiences, where they were free to criticize anyone, even the emperor. Within the palace itself, the Censorate oversaw matters of imperial protocol and palace procedures. In the provinces, the Censorate regularly inspected the work of officials and made reports to the emperor or other proper authority. The purpose of the Censorate was to guarantee ethical behavior, just fulfillment of one's duties, and high standards of official conduct.

Policy was made in discussions between the heads of the Secretariat, the Chancellery and the Department of State. Their decisions were presented to the emperor in an audience attended by other high officials, who were entitled to add their own views. From these audiences came the series of edicts that governed China. The system of government was, traditionally, vertical. That is, each senior official was directly responsible to the emperor and was appointed and dismissed by him. T'ai-tsung's principle of personnel management was never to keep a good man too long in the same post. Because he made sound appointments, cleverly juggled men and offices, listened to all points of view, and seldom imposed his own will on his ministers and counselors, he built up an efficient, confident, and loyal bureaucracy. The first part of the T'ang dynasty saw that rare situation for China—a scarcity of

intrigue, an openness of decision, and a throne deliberately limiting its powers.

The preservation and encouragement of a civil service on traditional lines and the reaffirmation of the role of the Secretariat and the Chancellery were a graceful acknowledgment to the past empire and to the role of alien dynasties in transmitting and adding to Chinese tradition. The Sui had started these in principle, having borrowed the ideas from northern Wei, which had received them from southern Ch'i, which in its turn had inherited them from Han refugees. The south had preserved the inspiration and model of Han government and, blown into life under northern Wei and Sui, it was to flower under T'ang.

Under this dynasty the villages—and China was still a land of villages—were left alone to be supervised by their elders and magistrates, being obliged to keep the peace, pay their taxes, and do their service. Hanging over their heads was a harsh penal law but one immeasurably better than the Sui code (the law codes were modified from dynasty to dynasty), and in some measure the criminal law of T'ang was probably the most humane in Chinese history. Government of these masses consisted of thousands of daily administrative decisions, many by lowly officials, and if they were unjust or arbitrary, there was little chance for a man (it is hard to think of a Chinese as a "citizen") to gain redress. The web of maturing T'ang government was a managerial-administrative tyranny. Yet it possessed substantial safeguards against tyranny. For one thing, no magistrate of significance remained long enough in the same territory to develop a proprietary interest in his district or office. Secondly, the censorial service acted as an effective check on administration. Thirdly, the whole concept of the service rested on an ethical base. While the constant shifting of posts acted as a safeguard, it also had shortcomings. For example, a new administrator had to depend upon the local permanent staff of minor flunkies for information, and at times a ludicrous situation occurred, where the incoming magistrate or governor could not speak the language of the district. Po Chu-I remarked on this:

> From my high castle I look at the town below
> Where the natives of Pa cluster like a swarm of flies.

How can I govern these people and lead them aright?
I cannot even understand what they say.*

Criminal law was harsh and pervasive even under a clement code, because it represented the norms of the public morality. The binding concept was equity, in the proper meaning of a concensus of the public will. Unfortunately, magistrates in China were not supermen and their personal concept of equity was the preservation of the Confucian order. An accused was in trouble simply because by being accused he had disturbed the flow of affairs. He represented a social undesirable, best gotten rid of. "The best magistrate is he before whom comes the fewest lawsuits," said one cynic of his period.† Although T'ang established a separate department of state for the administration of justice and encouraged law studies at the national universities, few students took the course. Law was never considered more than a branch of moral studies.

THE STATE SERVICE

The civil service examination became institutionalized in early T'ang, and as a result the educated monopolized practical affairs of government for the first time rather than the aristocrats, the well-born, the wealthy, and the influential. There were several reasons for this change. For one thing, the old aristocrats despised the Li family as parvenues and detested the rather free and open social system of T'ang. While the distinctions of class remained, there were no artificial barriers to prevent a rise in status. A peasant family, for example, could rise to the scholar class. For another thing it had become increasingly difficult since the last days of Han to find suitable and worthy men for office. For centuries, wherever government had functioned in China, the principle of meritorious selection had been paid lip service. Officials were selected by the locally powerful gentry, and thus administrative power and social status went hand in hand. The Emperor Wen of Sui (not an aristocrat) had broken this system, and T'ai-tsung,

* A. Waley, *Translations from the Chinese* (New York: Knopf, 1940), p. 225.
† J. Escarra, *Le Droit Chinois* (Peking: Henri Vetch, 1936), p. 109.

in many respects as much a man of the pen as of the sword, had regularized it.

Examinations were open to all qualified men (save for artisans and criminals and, in the early period, merchants, T'ang being no more disposed to have wealthy merchants enter politics than any other dynasty).

After 736 A.D. the examinations were given by the Board of Rites, which had primary responsibility for the Confucian cult. It is little wonder that a T'ang examination candidate had to be well fortified with a study of the Classics. By making the examinations literary, the Board of Rites performed more than a pious purpose. It ensured that any intelligent man through application to a commonly available body of knowledge could make himself eligible for government service. On the other hand, it meant that a significant number of civil servants possessed only literary skills, and a large number of men of real talent resented the devotion of so much of their time to such dispiriting study, even though reward and position lay just past the formal subjective examination. Paradoxically, even the learned benefactors of the examination system, the greatest institutional construct of learning ever known, complained about it. This was to have the most significant effects in later T'ang and in Sung.

A successful candidate could wait years for an appointment, meanwhile soliciting influence, as did Po Chu-I, or he could elect to take the placement examination of the Board of Civil Service. This involved matters of judgment but was preceded by a stiff character investigation, including letters of reference and proof that one's father was not a merchant, artisan, or criminal. In either case, the long wait or the placement test, it was perfectly evident that neither merit nor learning alone were deciding factors. It may well have been the manner of selection rather than the formal, tedious examination study that angered men of real ability, but the struggle for a post and for advancement was too much a matter of survival to permit the sacrifice of a career for principle.

THE LAND ECONOMY

T'ai-tsung and his advisers, aware of the potential wealth of the new China, were faced with a severe postwar depression. The

greatest single economic factor of the T'ang government was its absolute dependence upon the south of China for about 90 percent of its tax revenues. The bulk of the population now lived in the Yangtze valley area and south of it, where the bulk of the grain was grown. The tremendous tonnage of tax grain needed at the capital had to be moved from the fruitful Yangtze to the dusty plains of the upper Yellow River. Therefore the Grand Canal of the Sui rulers was to prove the lifeline of the T'ang. Along it moved the food grains that kept the state and empire alive, for the political capital, Chang-an, was solely a military site. The regions around it were hard pressed to feed themselves, much less support the capital of a great empire. The cost of transporting the tax grain to the capital was enormous, for once it passed through the Grand Canal it had to be moved into and against the current of the Yellow River at a great price in time and labor to the unfortunate provinces along the way.

It would appear that the geographical location of the capital played a significant part in bringing down every dynasty from T'ang onward. Once the demographic and economic base of China shifted southward during the long period of disunion, there was no need for locating the administrative and imperial center of China in the war-ravaged northwest. Had it been placed either at Nanking or Hangchow, as it was to be at intervals, the cost of supporting the central administration would have significantly diminished, with consequent economic benefits. The chief administrators would have been closer to the bulk of officialdom, and perhaps most important, the capital would have been defensible to a degree that Chang-an or Loyang were not. For while Chang-an was selected for its military advantages, it could be isolated and cut off by cavalry warfare. A capital located on the Yellow River line was a strong point against this kind of warfare, as was to be proven later. Yet the removal of the capital to the south would have abandoned the ancient homeland of China to barbarians, for even had Chang-an remained as a great military center, nothing but their total disappearance from the face of the earth would have prevented the nomads and the tribes from moving into the northwest. In addition, without Chinese control of the northwest the road west would have been difficult if not impos-

sible to hold, endangering trade with the rest of Asia.

Thus the capital was located in the ancient heartland. Since it lived on imported grain, there had to be assurances that the grain could be transported to Chang-an (at one point a city of over two million people) and produced in quantities sufficient to maintain the empire. This means the early T'ang ministers had to devise a scheme for re-allocating the land comprising the great estates and for creating a stable and productive peasant class. The entire financial system of T'ai-tsung and his early successors was based on these land reforms. Since, in theory, the state owned all the land, it could easily diminish the large estates. It also set out to bring back into cultivation lands abandoned during the long civil wars. To each adult male (of the peasant class) between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-nine there was granted a holding of one hundred *mu* of land, one fifth of which was heritable and four fifths of which reverted to the state at death to be re-allocated. Each peasant paid an annual tax for his holding in cloth or grain and labor. The tax was based on a sliding scale, taking into account numerous factors, such as fertility of land, size of household, etc. The sale of the heritable fifth was forbidden, in order to prevent the growth of estates. The method of allocation was extremely complex in an attempt to balance fertile land, poor land, and land with available manpower. The government itself retained large amounts of land for rental income and for pasturing. The long-service garrisons on the northeastern and northwestern frontiers were granted holdings on which they were expected to be self-sufficient.

This "equal field" system worked well for a time under good administration and achieved particularly its aim of increased crop production. But there was not enough land to go around. Slowly the forbidden sale of distressed land went on, estates again accumulated, and the costs of government, hence taxes, rose, placing an increasing burden on the peasant. The genesis of the "equal field" system had considerable altruism in it, for there was a real desire to help the peasant as well as to eliminate mammoth landholdings. But at the outset the system was weakened by the method of official allotments. The officials and the nobility received as permanent, heritable allotments land ranging from

several ch'ing to as much as a hundred ch'ing. Since there was a continual increment of officials, the amount of land available for apportionment became increasingly scarce. Officials juggled land allotments. Hard-pressed peasants became hired labor on the rising estates or squatters on derelict land. In addition, there were tax exemptions for officials, favorites, and the large monastic orders, while the nobility were paid substantial incomes out of tax money proportionate to their rank. So, despite good intentions and initially sound administration, the system proved to be an inordinate drain on a country where good land was scarce and the population increasing.

The system was weakened further by the north's increased production of wheat (introduced in the Han), which was suited to extensive cultivation and hence to large estates. By the beginning of the eighth century the dream of a prosperous peasantry working its own acres was still a dream, as the following quote of La Chih, a T'ang official, indicates:

> Those who are rich acquire land to the extent of tens of thousands of *mou*, while the poor do not even have homes in which to rest their feet. These poor depend entirely upon the rich, becoming in fact their private possessions. They borrow their seedlings and food, they pay rent for their land and dwellings. Throughout the year they toil and sweat continually without a day of rest . . . those who own land, however, lead leisurely lives, living on the income from their land. Such is the unbridgeable gap between the rich and the poor.*

THE SUCCESSION

The tragedy of T'ai-tsung and his brothers was repeated with T'ai-tsung and his sons. Ch'eng-chien, his heir, was a wild and moody youth who detested court life and played at being a Turkish commander of cavalry. The younger T'ai, his son by a concubine, was talented, able, and ambitious. The two brothers came to hate each other, which was perhaps natural, for each represented a fundamental and conflicting aspect of the Li family—T'ai seemingly being what his father had become and Ch'eng-

* K. Chen, "The Hui-chang Suppression of Buddhism," *The Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* Vol. 19 (1956), p. 74.

chien being a nomadic avatar of the partly Turkish family. The increasingly bitter Ch'eng-chien finally plotted against his brother's life, a scheme that broadened to include a revolt against his father. No one, however, rallied to his banner. He was proclaimed a rebel, reduced to commoner status by his father, and exiled to Szechuan, where he died. The younger T'ai had not conducted himself well during the incident, and his father, probably oppressed by the memory of his own brothers, passed him over to name the second son, Sun Ch'ih, as heir to the throne.

Sun Ch'ih, who became Emperor Kao-tsung (649–683), was a good-natured man and an ineffective ruler. This made little difference, for the rule was still securely based on the achievements, administration, and peace of T'ai-tsung, and such a legacy could easily have carried a successor weaker than Kao-tsung. But as it turned out the actual rule in China from the death of T'ai-tsung to 705 came to rest in the hands of an exceptionally able woman, the Empress Wu, concubine of T'ai-tsung and wife and empress to Kao-tsung.

Empress Wu has not received good notices in Chinese history. Like Wang Mang, she did not fit the canons of traditional monarchy. The idea of open rule by a woman was shocking, and in the haste to condemn her the Confucian historians tend to gloss over fifty years of capable government, which were by no means to the disadvantage of the scholars who disliked her.

As concubine to an emperor, Wu Chao had, in conformance with protocol, retired to a Buddhist monastery on the death of T'ai-tsung. Kao-tsung, who had known and liked her, brought her out of retirement as his concubine and, later, his empress. Since he was a lazy man, she simply ruled for him. When Kao-tsung died suddenly in 683, she deposed their son and continued to rule. In 705, when she was eighty-two, she was forced to abdicate in favor of the deposed son, who became Emperor Chung-tsung. During her fifty years of power, China continued to prosper, the empire was maintained, and most important of all, the T'ang court and government remained both legitimate and Chinese.

The main historical charges against her are irrelevant when her over-all performance is considered. The accusations of an unsavory private life had no bearing on her public duty. The

charge that she favored Buddhism had to be considered in light of the fact that she *was* a Buddhist and had once received sanctuary in a Buddhist community. Furthermore, Buddhism in China was already four centuries old, fully acclimated as part of Chinese life, and during Wu Chao's age it was at the height of its intellectual, artistic, and religious influence.

Wu's son lasted as emperor only five years. In 710 he was murdered by his wife, also called Wu, who desired to emulate her now-dead mother-in-law in deed as well as name, but the lesser Wu was almost at once deposed by Li Lung-chi, a grandson of the Empress Wu, who in 712 took the throne as Emperor Hsuan-tsung (712–756). For the first thirty-nine years of his reign the court was so brilliant and the façade of T'ang power still so inspiring, despite the slow shrinkage of the empire, that he has been called Ming Huang, "Brilliant Emperor." But in 731, his reign found itself at the mercy of profound military, economic, and administrative changes whose origins went back to the beginning of the seventh century.

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T'ang Ming Huang's Empire

THE WATERSHED YEARS

The reign of Ming Huang began under certain handicaps that were at first eclipsed by the cultural glories of the court and Chang-an and later concealed by the highly effective domination of a ruthless chief minister. Not the least of the handicaps was the paradoxical position of Ming Huang himself. He was as talented as he was kindly and generous. He was dedicated to keeping the peace of China in each of the 362 prefectures, and on the frontiers he maintained order through the judicious use of the large and powerful army he had inherited. He strove to keep both taxes and prices within reason. He was a founder of schools and libraries and intellectually equal to the great poets and artists whom he patronized. By all the surface evidence, he was that rarest of Chinese autocrats, one to whom his subjects were both loyal and devoted. Yet Heavan, as if ashamed of its abundance, visited upon him disasters equal to his brilliance. Under him the economy was ruined, civil war broke out, and the empire was lost. He had inherited the greatest state in the world. He left it a cauldron of quarreling regional war lords.

Why one reign should encompass both the zenith and the nadir of the dynasty is a puzzle until the changes that had been slowly accumulating since the death of T'ai-tsung, especially con-

cerning the political position of the emperor, are considered, as well as certain radical features of the administrative acts of 624. Among them was a military reorganization unprecedented in China. The armies that marched across Asia came from about eight hundred military districts, each of which furnished its quota of conscripts. A man was liable for military duty between the ages of twenty-one and sixty, and each year after the harvest he did his annual training locally. In time of war he was called to service (without pay), and at the conclusion of the campaign he was demobilized. Thus the great bulk of the early T'ang infantry and cavalary were unpaid conscripts. Had the armed forces been paid, it is doubtful if the empire could have maintained an army. The officers, who were paid, received their training in some sixteen military schools set up by T'ai-tsung. General officers were put on permanent service and not just commissioned for a campaign. At the conclusion of campaigns the high-ranking officers were ordered to Chang-an for duty. This was to avoid keeping a ranking officer so long in one region or with one garrison that he might gain loyalties of his own and get ideas about rebellion, a precaution that paid off for years, for the first half of the T'ang era was free of military subversion. A permanent imperial guard was stationed at the capital, and of course there were long-service garrisons on the frontiers. But aside from these and a scattering of Turk cavalry mercenaries, the regional armed forces of T'ang were made up of farmer-soldiers closely supervised by officers. The soundness of this military organization was a reflection of the soundness of the civil organization.

In 624 it had been provided that a province would have only a single authority, who could be a military man, and further that the governor-general would have fiscal control of his area. But it was also stipulated that military governors were subordinate to the central civil administration, and every effort was made in the military schools to inculcate a sense of subordination to the central government. Therefore sound efforts were made to prevent praetorianism. T'ang is the first and only time in Chinese history that the military were held in regard by the court and the populace. This was not true, however, of Confucian officers, as this statement by J. K. Rideout points out:

> Between a civil official and a military official was a gulf that divided education from illiteracy, and while a chief minister and a general might be equal, to the one the other was an object of contempt.*

In the late seventh century and the early eighth century, the administration of the army began to deteriorate, partly because of a long period of peace and partly because the breakdown of the "equal field" system affected local government and therefore the cadastral records. In the time of the Empress Wu the annual training of conscripts was neglected, as was the three-year cycle of relief and replacement for the frontier garrisons. One result of the latter was desertion, and commanders, unable to rely on the arrival of replacements, had to hire mercenaries locally. By Ming Huang's time the confusion in the census and land registry records and the disappearance of the farmer conscript (at least from official records) made it increasingly difficult to summon men for military service. The governors of strategic border areas were left to their own devices to maintain their forces, a matter not only of national necessity but of their own personal honor and ambition. After 710 the dynasty was indiscriminately permitting military governors to exercise inordinate control. In the period 725–727 the system of conscription was abandoned in favor of manning the frontier armies. The most important fighting units then became professional forces under commanders who were not necessarily Chinese, but Turk or Korean. Since a successful military command or success in battle carried with it handsome remunerations and honors, T'ang frontier governors became more aggressive, and other officers, finding themselves in civil control, began the experiment of dabbling in imperial politics. Eventually a command of troops was considered a desirable step in a political career.

T'ANG IMPERIAL SOCIETY

The reign of Ming Huang is generally considered the climax of Chinese artistic and cultural development, but it was a reign of very significant social change as well. This change had produced

* J. K. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs During the T'ang Dynasty, Part One (618–705)," *Asia Major*, New Series, I:1 (1949–1950), p. 63.

stresses that ultimately erupted in the great rebellion of An Lu-shan, after which the T'ang empire was in difficulty for a century and a half.

At the bottom of society were the peasants, slaves, and city poor, who formed the vast majority of the population and were of significance only in times of catastrophe when they rose up against unjust officials or impossible conditions. Above them in wealth, though not necessarily in social prestige, were the merchants and artisans, whose wealth permitted them an occasional social ease denied them by law and sometimes provided the means to join the literati by educating their sons and buying land. The literati formed a gentry whose wealth lay in land and in government stipends, and they lived mainly in the northeast and in the prosperous and flourishing south. Perhaps the most flexible social group was the Buddhist and Taoist clergies, a group with potentially great power, who were rigorously restrained by the government. At the top of the social classes were the aristocrats, comprising the Li family and the royal families of the Northern Chou, Ling, Ch'en, and Sui dynasties. These families were centered in the northwest, within the passes surrounding the capital Chang-an.

The power structures of the reign of Ming Huang started with the emperor himself. The imperial family of the Li surname, princes and princesses of royal blood, were awarded power in terms of sinecures, social position, and wealth. Competing with them in influence, though far less secure, were the external clans, who gained power through marriages to the emperor and imperial princes. With a weak or ineffectual ruler, the ambitious, able, or unscrupulous members of the clan of the empress could dominate the government and state. Here usurpation was a constant temptation, which had to be restrained.

DISINTEGRATION OF THE ECONOMY

The succession of coups and counter-coups, revolts and suppressions that marred the decade before Ming Huang's ascent to the throne had been horribly costly and debilitating to Chinese government, because those who supported the winning faction were rewarded with sinecures, a continuing expense. Even those not directly involved in the coups sometimes had to be bribed into

neutrality, so that by 712 a parasitic horde of princes, princesses, and court favorites were pocketing the revenues of government. Fortunes had also been made during the struggles by selling offices and procuring the enrollment of monks and nuns. (The Chinese government demanded payment, when it consented at all, to allow a person to become a monk and thus no longer a taxpayer.) The result was that the tax rolls were depleted and hundreds, even thousands, of officials had been added to the state budget. A financial crisis of considerable dimension faced Ming Huang.

He moved against these accumulated abuses with an energy and intelligence reminiscent of the dynasty's founder, T'ai-tsung. He eliminated supernumerary officials, laicized monks and nuns, and drastically trimmed the revenues of imperial hangers-on. These energetic measures not only strengthened the emperor and the government but won widespread approval among the Confucian literati for eliminating waste and inefficiency. Ming Huang also improved the functioning of government and increased the flow of taxes to the capital, while constantly concentrating power in himself and the central bureaucracy. These measures were an immediate, visible attempt to deal with the problems of government within the framework of traditional Confucian reform.

A more fundamental problem, however, was the fact that the basic assumptions on which governmental fiscal policies rested were no longer valid. There had been a fundamental change in the character of the country that could not be clearly conceptualized within governmental (Confucian) ideology and which, in the absence of accurate statistics, could not be adequately known to officials. First, reunification of the country, reconquest of the empire, and the ensuing long years of peace had brought about vastly increased trade between the various regions of the country, in particular between the north and south. This had been accompanied with a considerable increase in agricultural production in the south and in the amount of land under cultivation. Second, as in the Han, there had been a large-scale migration from the north to the south. The result was that the north was proportionately overtaxed and the increasingly wealthy south was proportionately undertaxed. Further, the wealth produced by the south was not efficiently utilized by the central government, nor was its potential

contribution to the fiscal needs of the government even recognized.

The changes occurred over a century, and during any one year, or even one reign, were perhaps undetectable (in a pre-statistical age), except when their effects were so great as to require adjustment. In 681 permission had been granted for peasants to leave the lower Yellow River, and in 697 peasants had fled from a nomad invasion. Others fled to avoid military service, to escape harsh treatment, and to try the more pleasant life of the south. These migrations were not evenly distributed across north China. The situation in the north, particularly in Hopei, constantly deteriorated, and "banditry," waged by small-scale, guerrillalike bands that opposed the government, broke out in 698. Disorders increased governmental expenditures, while migrations undermined the tax system. To counteract the problems, the sale of land was limited and the movement of peasants was restricted or prohibited, but enforcement of these measures was difficult.

Generally the bureaucracy was charged with enforcing regulations that undermined its own economic position. Land was accumulated by taking advantage of loopholes in the legal code, but illegal methods were more common. Land vacated by peasants during floods and famines, or abandoned during invasions, were seized and enclosed and the tax registers and records simply falsified. Peasants were turned into tenant-farmers and disappeared from the tax rolls. Although this situation was repeated throughout China, it was aggravated by various local circumstances. In the north, Hopei was subject to relatively frequent invasions and incursions, and the resulting instability produced, as we have seen, "banditry." Around the capital itself, the estates of landholders were sometimes built up into incipient industrial areas, utilizing the power resources of water-mills installed by enterprising officials, but more often the estates were merely pleasure grounds for the aristocracy, resulting in a significant decline in the food production of the area. Simultaneously, however, the population of the capital was continuing to expand, placing graver pressures on the food resources.

Estates were being built not by the aristocracy but more generally by the new rich, who became the literary gentry. Their estates provided them with the economic means to educate them-

selves and prepare for governmental service. But as estates multiplied, tax revenues fell. It was difficult for the government to develop a policy asking the literati to conscientiously liquidate the economic basis of its own position and power. It is significant, therefore, that the succession of economic ministers who proposed a reform of the fiscal policies of the empire and enforcement of the regulations came from the aristocracy, who had acquired office through hereditary privilege.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF REFORMS

In the early years of the dynasty during the reign of T'ai-tsung, the immediate needs of government and the court could be satisfied from the capital area, where there were ample supplies of grain, or from the Honan and Hopei provinces. The revenues of the south came to the court in the form of cloth and other goods. But the civil service had swollen to some seventy times its size, and within the palace there had been a similar growth. There was a concentration of population in the Chang-an prefecture and a corresponding decrease of population in the outlying districts around the capital as land was taken out of production. Neglect of the transport system added to the problems. The Grand Canal, built at such expense by Sui Yang-ti, had been little used, and for fifteen years at the beginning of the eighth century it was completely blocked. Food shortages became endemic, and it was necessary to move the capital out of Chang-an to the more easily supplied city of Loyang. Though the emperor and his officials were aware of the problem as early as 721, no systematic attempt was made to solve it. In 730 a member of the aristocracy, P'ei Yao-ch'ing (681–743), memorialized the throne on the inefficiency of the transport system, but his proposals received no attention since no emergency existed. In 733, however, there was a failure of crops, and it became necessary to move the capital to Loyang. Once again P'ei submitted his proposals. This time they were approved, and he was made chief minister. Carefully analyzing the transport system, P'ei pointed out that there were long delays in the shipment of the grain from the south, since it was necessary to send it through the canal at a speed governed by the water level in each section. The result was waste, spoilage, and an increase

in costs. P'ei proposed that the grain be shipped in relays, with barges shuttling back and forth through designated sections of the canal, unloading their cargoes to be stored in granaries, until the water level rose in the next section. Then other barges would be loaded and the grain transported along the next section. The result would be reduced costs. Further, coarse grain would be exchanged for refined grain, so that it could be more easily transported.

P'ei's recommendation had an immediate effect. Within a few years, the canal could be used to ship some 7,000,000 measures of grain to Chang-an, compared to only 200,000 in the reign of T'ai-tsung, and this was done with a savings of over 300,000 strings of cash. By 736 the emperor was able to return to Chang-an and to remain there. The success of the reforms had put the empire on a more stable economic basis and prepared the way for the exploitation of the wealth of the south. A successor, Wei Chien, greatly improved on P'ei's tapping of the south. He saw that grain was no longer a pressing need and began a conversion to light goods, hastening a developing tendency toward an exchange economy. This also marked a fundamental shift from fiscal reform and governmental stabilization to outright exploitation of the resources of the empire to provide luxuries, entertainment, and pleasures for the court and palace.

Li Lin-fu was appointed a minister in 736 and until his death in 752 systematically collected power so that he was virtual dictator. Ming Huang, who had effectively been involved in government for some thirty years since the abdication of the Empress Wu and had himself ruled for twenty-four years, was aging and seems to have lost all interest in government, which allowed Li Lin-fu to rule in his stead. Then in 737, Ming Huang engineered the murder of three of his sons, including his heir. By thus removing all family influence, he became the tool of his eunuchs and of his favorite concubine, Yang Kuei-fei. His infatuation for this courtesan was so great that by 745 she and her family, along with Li Lin-fu, were the government of China. The emperor who had hated nepotism and kept his family at arms length, who by murder removed his sons from power, now permitted the Yang sisters, their brothers, cousins, and friends to run affairs of state

and to take bribes openly, to corrupt, and to exert their influence as they pleased.

Li Lin-fu was a superb manipulator. Part of his power lay in his ability to cozen the throne and part in his connections with the palace eunuchs, who kept him advised of the private plans of the emperor. Since he greatly feared any man who might possibly supplant him, honest and able men were dismissed or disgraced. Nowhere was this degeneration of the administration to have more serious effect than in Li Lin-fu's replacement of frontier area governors-general with men of his own choice. To ensure their dependence upon him, he appointed foreigners for the most part, and to keep them contented in their profession, he encouraged them in aggressive actions. By his death in 752 the major military districts entrusted with the frontier defense were under the control of adventurers who, while excellent commanders, had little loyalty to either the civilization or the dynasty they served. The commander in the Tarim, Kao Hsien-chi, was a Korean; the commander of the Tibetan frontier was a "barbarian," Ko-sho Han. They had both civil and military authority in their command areas. In the absence of a strong central army, there was no longer any effective check on these men, who regarded war as glorious in itself, or on their forces. In 727, through the politics of Li Lin-fu and the indifference of Ming Huang, both the permanent northern army, stationed in Chang-an, and conscription had been abandoned. Then in 751 three stupendous military defeats toppled the dynasty.

THE DISASTERS OF 751

In the seventh century, parallel with the rise of T'ang, a powerful fighting force, imbued with all the spirit of a universal religion, was growing beyond Persia—the Omayyad house of Damascus, successors to the prophet Mohammed as commanders in chief of the armies of Islam, who in 674 had taken Persia from the Sassanids. Persia had asked Chang-an for help, none was given, and now an enemy and not a friend lay on the fringes of China in Central Asia. Persian refugees, including the Persian royal house, fled to China, and with them went Zoroastrianism.

In the eighth century a fifty-year struggle began between China and the Arabs. Between 707 and 713 the Arabs under

Kutaiba, governor-general of Khorasan (the land between the Hindu Kush and the Amu Darya) and general for the caliph, took Balkh, Bokhara, Samarkand, Ferghana, and Tashkent. In 714 internal dissension in the Arab world caused Kutaiba to withdraw, and a peace was arranged. In 751, however, a Chinese commander interfered in the internal affairs of Tashkent, which in union with those Tarim kingdoms that had long resented Chinese domination, called on the new Abbasid caliphate at Baghdad for help. The Arabs responded, and later in the year a Chinese army on the Talas River was annihilated, breaking the Chinese grip on Central Asia. Reduced to scattered garrisons, Chinese power in the western regions began its slow decline. The defeat was an impetus for an important cultural diffusion. Chinese technicians, including paper-makers, were captured at the Talas, and paper-making began its passage west as the craftsmen were settled in Samarkand. In 753 a released prisoner reported:

> As for the weavers who make light silks (in the Arab capital), the goldsmiths (who work) gold and silver (there), and the painters; (the arts which they practice) were started by Chinese technicians.*

Oddly enough, the Moslem victory in Central Asia had no effect on the life of the sizable Moslem community in China or the important sea trade with the Arabs. In their thinking, the Chinese government evidently divorced the Arabs, with whom they had long been familiar, from Islam. They seem to have first encountered Islam when they received an embassy from the Caliph Othman in 651 A.D. But long before this a voluminous sea trade had developed between Canton and the Red Sea, controlled from Canton by a large Arab community. Indeed, after the Talas affair and the closing of the land routes, the maritime trade was expanded. Arabs settled not only at Canton and Khan-fu (a part of Hangchow) but were as far west as Sian, and after the Talas victory a number of Moslems drifted into Northwest China, marking the beginning of a Moslem population in that region. The Arab settlements continued until the sack of Hangchow in the civil war

* Needham, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 236.

of 875, when, it is written, twelve thousand Moslems, Jews, and Christians were murdered by the rebel victors, not for their religions but as part of a general reprisal against that city. This brought the Moslem trading community to Tonkin until its reestablishment in Canton in the Sung period.

The Talas River battle was only the beginning. In the same year Chinese armies were badly defeated on every frontier. The Tibetans, much more of a threat than the Arabs because they lay athwart western Kansu and western Szechuan, had unified early in T'ang and been a constant trouble in the west and southwest. From 745 to 750 Chinese expeditionary forces had pushed southwest as far as the foothills of the Pamirs in order to isolate the Tibetans, but after the defeat at the Talas these forces were withdrawn, and in 763 the Tibetans moved to capture Chang-an itself. They were driven out of the capital, but until 849 they remained in control of the western parts of Kansu and Szechuan.

On the south, in Yunnan, the Nan-chao state, an ally that had been a vital buffer for T'ang against Tibet, grew increasingly impatient with the tax demands of T'ang, declared its independence of Chinese sovereignty, allied itself with the Tibetans, and between 676 and 713 built itself up as an independent state. It was too strong and too strategic (it controlled the China-Burma route) to be coerced. It could only be watched. In 713 it broke with Tibet. In 751 it defeated a Chinese army at Hsia-kuan, and in 754, in conjunction with malaria, inflicted a stunning defeat on a Chinese expeditionary corps of "frightened creatures, not fighting men."

> . . . the Prime Minister, concealed it from the ignorant Emperor, . . . and instead announced a victory. How such a situation was possible is hard to understand, but it shows the extent to which a Chinese Emperor was at the mercy of his eunuchs and ministers.*

In the northwest the year 751 was equally grim. The Khitan Tatars slaughtered a T'ang army on the Liao River, ending Chinese power in Korea and marking the establishment of the Liao

* H. Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics* (Hamden: Shoestring Press, 1954), p. 157.

kingdoms of the Khitans, which sprawled across the Great Wall into the Jehol, Chahar, and Suiyuan areas. By the end of T'ang the Khitans held the passes between Hopei and Mongolia, giving them an immovable foothold in North China that was to play a part in the doom of the Sung dynasty.

There was no question of military recovery from the disasters of 751. With the ravaging of the northwest the great pastures were lost. Remudas and war horses could be had only at a premium from Central Asian allies. Even had China not been internally ravaged, it is doubtful if Chang-an could have mustered the force needed to restore effective dominion over what were now independent and powerful states. The T'ang empire died giving life to these states.

The high-water mark of a great empire can be read in its sequel: the states of Pohai, Liao, and Chin in the north, the Hsi-Hsia state in the northwest, Silla and Koryo in Korean peninsula, Nan-chao and Ta-li in the southwest and Nam Viet or Vietnam in the south, and Nara Japan—all were heavily endowed with T'ang culture. Not all of these states emerged at the same time. The process stretches from 751 through the early tenth century, but by then Silla had taken over Chinese Korea, Nan-chao had taken over Chinese Yunnan, the Khitans had taken over Chinese Manchuria, and the Turks controlled Chinese Mongolia. The most powerful of the Turks were the Uigurs, who, with the Shato Turks, were friends and allies of Chang-an. It was the Turkish groups who began, at the end of T'ang, that great armed migration into Asia Minor that eventually destroyed both the dynasties and the Arab empires.

Any extended analysis of the decline of the power of the T'ang dynasty must take into account a fairly obvious factor that is often overlooked by commentators as they probe into the political, intellectual, social, and economic forces and institutions—that is, that the devastating military reverses of 751 were contingencies of history. They could not have been foreseen and they could not, considering their magnitude, be repaired. Without 751 Chinese history would have been different, of course. But 751 is a fact. Therefore, extended explanation of the internal changes after the Empress Wu does not suffice to explain the paradox of Ming

Huang, the brilliant state, the dying empire. A simpler explanation may serve. Military defeat increased the dynasty's expenditures beyond tolerable limits, cut its revenues, smashed its armies, and placed the defense of China in the hands of local forces commanded by men with few loyalties to the regime. Since the nature of the T'ang state was that of an empire on a continual war footing, the loss of its war powers marked the breaking point.

THE AN LU-SHAN REBELLION

While the armies were being driven back on the frontiers the struggle continued at Chang-an between Li Lin-fu and his enemies. When Li suddenly died in 752, it was apparent that no one was prepared or able to run the kind of dictatorship he had built up. The balance of power lay between the Yang clique and the military commanders, of whom the most notable was An Lu-shan in the northeast. To the Confucian historian there is no mitigating factor in the career or person of An Lu-shan. He is set down as a foreigner, barbarian, sycophant, and traitor, whose fat-bellied grossness was exceeded only by the grossness of the servile flattery whereby he insinuated himself into the good graces of Li Lin-fu and Yang Kuei-fei. The obscenity of his conduct and the depravity of his mind was matched by the enormity of his rebellion, which destroyed an empire and reduced a dynasty to the status of the running dogs of the Uigur Turks. A true representation of him is now impossible, but certainly hatred led Confucian historians to exaggerate, and one must consider the essential regional and national conditions that preceded his treasonable revolt.

He was indeed a barbarian, born in 703 of a Sogdian mother and a Turkish father who had entered Chinese military service. We first come on An Lu-shan in 730, as an officer in the frontier forces just south of the Great Wall in the northwest. He served well in the series of wars that raged between the Wall and the Liao River, and because of Li Lin-fu's policy, he rose to command just as other "barbarians" came to command entire Chinese armies. He evidently ingratiated himself with the chief minister and with Yang Kuei-fei. She is recorded as having adopted the jovial fat man as her son. What An Lu-shan's ambitions were will never be known. The defeated and discredited leave few marks in Chinese

history. But we do know something of the general atmosphere of his region.

He was a successful, able general officer stationed near modern Peking and in control of an area that ran from central Hopei to the Gulf of Chihli. It was a region hardened by border war, populated with malcontents with a deep grievance against Chang-an and the T'ang dynasty and its ministers, and poorly fed and quite dependent on import of grain. Its upper class had served the Northern Wei dynasty and were not well regarded by the rest of the upper class, which had come to power at Chang-an on the coattails of Li Shih-min. Furthermore, there was a tendency to regard this region as not quite Chinese. The trouble was that the northeast gentry had become so intermixed with invaders over the centuries that they had taken on outlooks and habits not solidly orthodox in the Chinese canon.

Given An Lu-shan's origins and his identification with his region, the course of his actions becomes clearer. He was absolute commander of an important territory at a time when there was no effective rule in China. The strong man was dead, the emperor was besotted with his women, the central armies were badly crippled, the dynasty was alienated from the literati, gentry, and aristocracy, and the four borders were apparently cracking. The years 750–754 were years of drought, famine, flood, and hurricane. Power had come to rest by default in the hands of the chief concubine and her family. This clique, intent only on power and apparently viewing An Lu-shan, their former favorite, as a grave menace, foolishly began to conspire against him, though he was commander of the largest army of China.

Matters came to a head in December 755, when An Lu-shan began a military rebellion on the pretext of punishing the "disloyal" prime minister, Yang Kuo-chung. All Hopei fell to him at once, and the assassination of his son at Chang-an as a warning to him did not stop him. On January 18, 756, he took Loyang, where he proclaimed himself emperor. While loyal forces rallied to the dynasty, they could not match the men (and officials) who supported An Lu-shan. On July 14 Ming Huang was forced to flee from Chang-an. The next day, some forty miles west of the capital, his escort killed most of his advisers and strangled Yang Kuei-fei

before permitting the emperor to find sanctuary in Szechuan. In August, Ming Huang declared himself emperor-emeritus and turned the throne and the problem of retaking it over to his third son, who became Emperor Su-tsung.

An Lu-shan, who seemed to have no plans for government, gave himself up to pleasure and revenge to such an extent that some of his commanders deserted him, while others, including a surviving son, conspired to murder him. He was hacked to death in his bed in January by a follower appropriately named Little Pig, and in mid-757 his armies were defeated outside Chang-an by Su-tsung, who had raised loyal forces that included Arab and Uigur mercenaries and fought his way back to the capital.

BREAKUP OF THE T'ANG EMPIRE

So Chinese fought Chinese and Turk fought Turk during these years. An Lu-shan's rebellion, and other rebellions he had touched off in North China, dragged on across the Yellow River plains until the last of them was put down in 762, the year Su-tsung died.

The damage was incalculable. Loyang was never rebuilt. The remaining troops in Central Asia were pulled back, which in effect yielded Kansu to Tibet, while the Chinese populations and garrisons of the region tried to make out as best they could. In 808 the Uigurs took part of Kansu from Tibet, and the Chinese were reduced almost to begging the Tibetans for good relations in the west. The census figures for 764 give a count of 16,920,368 persons; for 742, 48,909,800. Even allowing for inaccuracies, for tens of thousands of uncountable migrants and refugees, for lost records, and for the sometimes incredibly exaggerated fluctuations of Chinese census figures, the drop must have been severe. That ancient theater of war that stretched from Kansu to Shantung was in economic ruins. The price of rice was 350 times its normal cost. The complex and vital water transport and control system was neglected. South China, well out of the sweep of the rebellion, now became the permanent center of gravity of China. The frontiers remained under constant harassment. The restored central government was unable to fully trust its officials (much of the

bureaucracy had gone over to the rebellion), and an emperor felt he could rely only on his eunuchs.

T'ang rulers after Su-tsung made repeated efforts to stabilize the dynasty, which meant, fundamentally, the recovery of central revenues through new tax measures. The revolts of 755–762 had so confused the cadastral records that a new tax system had to be introduced. In 780 Prime Minister Yang Yen installed the "twice-a-year tax," a land tax collected in summer and autumn. All other taxes were either abolished or incorporated into the twice-a-year tax, which was payable in kind or in copper coins. The taxes assessed were based on government estimates of future expenditures, while the base of taxation was set according to land holdings and incomes. For the first time a principle of equity was introduced into a Chinese tax system. No longer was a tax levied simply on a household or an individual, but on real property and on income. The tax came under attack from taxpayers, from Confucian theorists like Liu Ch'ih (who believed firmly that labor, not property, was the primary source of wealth), and most importantly from the provincial governors. These men had armies to feed and pay and could not or would not send tax revenues to Chang-an. Even the great efforts of Emperor Hsien-tsung (805–820) to take away the fiscal autonomy of the provinces failed to make them remit monies.

By 790 the financial position of the state was serious, and if the central government hoped to survive against the pressures of external enemies and internal disaffection, it had to secure adequate income by some means. There was one great untapped source of wealth—the vast holdings in land, labor, and precious metals, of the Buddhist sects. But before considering this situation, it is necessary to turn to the intellectual phenomena of the time and especially to the condition of orthodox Confucianism.

[24]

T'ang Confucianism

THE SUPPRESSION OF BUDDHISM

The disorders of the eighth century and later had forced many scholars to live by getting any kind of job (it is estimated that after 800 there were more than six qualified candidates for every post) and brought into question a good many traditions and conventions. Nothing clears an intellectual's mind so sharply as the knowledge that his learning is useless. In the face of the situation, scholars sought such rational (and legalistic) reforms as would make Confucianism operate better than it demonstrably had. By and large, this group tended to be xenophobic, believing that events of foreign origin had disrupted their world. While they were in no position to take on either the Turks or the Tibetans (or even Chinese rebels) they could challenge the material and intellectual hold of Buddhism, which to them, despite its total acclimatization, was still "foreign." Their principle objectives were (1) the reformulation of Confucianism so as to derive from it answers as satisfying for life as those of the Buddhists; (2) the regeneration of the examination system so as to bring able men into service and power; and (3) a direct attack on the temporal powers of the Buddhists.

To take the question of Buddhist wealth first, it is doubtful

whether the many arguments against Buddhism by the scholars would have had much effect had the government not been desperate for money. Buddhism had always enjoyed a measure of favor at the court, despite the imperial taste for Taoism. Buddhists were palace chaplains; the government supported temples and hospitals; aristocrats widely patronized Buddhism, its works, and its scholars and abbots; and, as is evident, Buddhist teachings had a rooted place in the public heart and mind. Thus it is almost impossible that Buddhism would ever have been suppressed on purely religious grounds. But the church was a significant landholder and a power in credit and commerce. In a time of economic troubles, its great productive tax-exempt estates, its increasing thousands of nonproductive monks and nuns, and its reserves of precious metals made it an obvious target for a needy government.

We do not know the social origins of the monks and nuns. People of all classes, probably, and certainly a large number of peasants became tenants or serfs on the monastery estates. It is easy to understand how after 762 the obscure peasant, plagued by hunger and war, would respond to the call of the orders with their promise of peace and security, and entry into monkhood carried with it exemption from military and labor service, although a certificate of ordination had to be purchased.

Unlike the European monastery, the Buddhist monastery was not a producing center of lay learning. Once in the orders monks and nuns could own personal and real property, both tax exempt, and they, as well as the order itself, could become landlords, money agents, and commercial factors. The monastic orders grew through donations, gifts, purchases, and investments; they seemed to live quite well, and their buildings were elaborate. Therefore they were regarded as an intolerable burden on a land whose tax base was constantly shrinking. The monasteries were emptying China of men and goods.

The suppression that ultimately broke the temporal power of Buddhism for all time occurred in 845. At least sixty thousand men and women were returned to the secular life, and the state seized forty-six hundred major monastic estates along with thousands of acres of land, thousands of slaves, and tons of bronze, copper, gold, and iron. The moral and emotional force of Bud-

dhism and its religious identification remained unhurt. The T'ang state was not interested in harming it, and neither were a great many Chinese intellectuals. This is what one of them wrote before the event:

> There is much in Buddhism which could not well be denounced; namely, all those tenets which are based on principles common to our own sacred books. It is precisely to these essentials, at once in perfect harmony with human nature and the teachings of Confucius, that I give my adhesion. . . . Now Han Yü objects to the commandments. He objects to the bald pates of the priests, their dark robes, their renunciation of domestic ties, their idleness and life generally at the expense of others. So do I. But Han Yü misses the kernel while railing at the husk. He sees the lode but not the ore. I see both; hence my partiality for the faith.*

During the T'ang dynasty, Buddhism thoroughly penetrated all phases of Chinese life. The accession of a new emperor, the birth of an imperial prince, and the births and deaths of ordinary people were occasions for the chanting of sutras, ceremonial donations to worthy causes and famous monasteries, and feasts for the clergy. Buddhist rituals were a part of imperial observances. Throughout China, in response to the Buddhist mandate to alleviate suffering, free dispensaries and hospitals were opened, and free hostels provided sanctuary for the traveler and the homeless. Customs such as liberating birds on festive occasions or in thankfulness for an unexpected food fortune also infused Chinese life with the spirit of Buddhist kindness, mercy, and compassion.

Despite the success of Buddhism on the social and moral plane, intellectually it went into decline. Brilliant Buddhist monks continued to expound the meaning of the sutras and debate problems of esoteric philosophy, but the increasing lack of a knowledge of Sanskrit, the absence of scholars from foreign lands to act as tutors, and above all the lack of a Rome or Cairo to organize, direct, and restrain doctrinal speculation, led to great abstruseness or utter banality. Chinese thinkers increasingly fell back

* R. Mather, "The Conflict of Buddhism and Native Chinese Ideologies," *Review of Religion,* XX (1955), p. 36.

on their native traditions and the distinctively Indian features of the philosophy and religion gradually atrophied.

RECONSTRUCTION OF CONFUCIANISM

T'ang Confucianism was, certainly at the outset, very dull, and despite its favor as an object of study, it was very much on the defensive. Centuries of competition with Buddhism and a refreshed Taoism had stripped it of any intellectual prestige or emotional solace. It could not possibly vie with the sophistication of thought and concern for the individual of Buddhism nor with the intellectual freedom and gross but pleasing superstition of Taoism. Without revisions it could never re-establish itself as the embodiment of the *Chinese* tradition.

The landholding class was quite powerful during this short-lived dynasty, and their power descended from and depended upon a Confucian form of society and government. Buddhism and Taoism as ways of *thought* about man and the universe were influential within this group, but neither could equal even an outmoded Confucianism in providing the forms of *action* that led to the control of public life. So we have a discrete separation of the three principal beliefs according to the contribution of each to the spiritual, intellectual, or practical aspects of a man's course through life. A providential synthesis such as Calvinism, which could within the one body of belief satisfy both material and spiritual desires, was quite unknown in China. Despite the need for Confucianism to reshape its ideas, it simply lacked the necessary scholarship, conviction, and fervor during these decades. As a result we find T'ang Confucianism to be a second-rate body of study. For example, at the beginning of T'ang a monumental commentary, "The True Meaning of the Five Classics," was compiled, which gave the examination system a firm basis but at the same time revealed such intellectual paucity that it was held in open scorn. This was of little concern to the Confucians. They were too well entrenched to be dismissed on the grounds of intellectual shallowness. So, while they were in ideological disrepute, they remained in bureaucratic favor. Above all they controlled education. T'ang was a remarkable period for building schools, libraries, institutes, and the great national universities, including

those for Confucian and Taoist studies, the specialized colleges for medicine, law, and mathematics, and the Han Lin academy—a center at the capital for the best scholars in China.

Yet the rather inchoate discontent among the beneficiaries of the system could not be ignored. Their common feeling appeared to be a sense of intellectual corruption, springing from the manipulating of words. There was a growing abyss between the deep savor of true Confucianism and the shallow sampling taught in the schools to those whose objective was government service. But it is only fair to state that a broad education was possible unless one chose to concentrate only on those subjects needed to pass the examinations. Says a memorial of 721:

> But now students of the classics are chiefly interested in securing positions. They eagerly concentrate on the Book of Rites because the text is short. . . . It is not proper to accede to the students' requests and adjust their studies to their desires.*

The first steps in the regeneration of Confucian thought were taken by the T'ang scholar and official Fu I, whose bitter attacks on Buddhism made no impression in his own day. For at that time the intellectual tools for combatting Buddhism did not exist, and any attack on Buddhism as foreign and un-Chinese made little headway with a dynasty itself part foreign and un-Chinese. Nevertheless, Fu I was the pioneer of a line of men who were slowly to re-examine traditional ideas, create a Confucian metaphysics equal to that of the Buddhists and Taoists, carry on a rational attack on Buddhism in the name of orthodoxy, and sow seeds for an intellectual renaissance that would flower centuries later in Sung. Confucianism could again become a penetrating and gripping ethic, provided it could be made palatable, intelligible, and useful. The government's demand for a national orthodoxy was no chimera. The northeast was separatist, as we have seen, the west was insecure, and the northwest (Chang-an) had proven vulnerable. Except for the south, the Chinese world might have dissolved, and the south was an exotic alien land of monsoons, jungles, camphor, bamboo, strange fruits and flowers, and

* Galt, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 324.

(to the North Chinese) simian aborigines. It was unthinkable to admit that tradition could not be made a valid and useful tool for governing all men everywhere.

In addition to their other discontents, the Confucian monopoly on the exams was being broken. In 741 the exams were revised so as to permit a man to be examined in Taoist texts, and in 742 *Chuang-tzu* and *Lao-tzu* were put on the same footing as the Confucian Classics.

HAN YÜ AND LI AO

Late T'ang scholars were faced with the difficult problem of cutting away the accretion of Confucian glosses to end the contradictions and to make the result palatable to the Buddhist-trained intellect. Even in an age when the most disparate groups were agreed that the examination system ought to be revised, reforms were delayed because of the crucial role of the exams for a civil service career. Yet many distinguished men failed the exams one or more times before they passed. But if they wanted to be members of the only class that counted, they took them. To fail to do so (as a man like Li Po did) was to forfeit any standing and to become an eccentric, a social cipher.

If a man challenged some vested interest, he suffered retaliation for the rest of his career. Only two kinds of men could openly advocate or initiate reforms: those very close to the throne or those who were willing to pay the career price. By and large, the late T'ang reformers were stifled by the conservative cliques around the throne, and many of them gave up and retreated into the study of literature or Taoism. They were also handicapped by the enmity of the eunuchs, whose influence was the object of reform proposals. However, some extraordinary men of repute pressed forward. In 806 Yüan Chen proposed that there be two examinations—one on literature, which would grant a degree but not a post; the other a technical examination, which would lead to a post. The second examination was to be based largely on contemporary matters to show that the candidates knew as much about their own world as they did about antiquity. The proposal failed. The man who was to continue the struggle was the great

scholar Han T'u-chih or Han Yü (768–824), the leader of the T'ang literary reforms.

Chinese prose style had become highly ornamented, allusive, obscure, and cumbersome, largely as a result of the artificial stylistic demands of the literary examinations. Han Yü wanted it to be direct, terse, lucid. He also wanted to make study of the Confucian writings a guide to life, not merely another branch of literature along with the Taoist and Buddhist. He considered the teachers and tutors who prepared their pupils for success in the examinations as sophists and false Confucians, in the same degenerate category as Buddhists and Taoists; for all denied the only true values, which were the foundations of Confucian and hence of Chinese life. He summed these values up thus:

> . . . to love extensively *Jen*. To do what is appropriate is *I* (righteousness). . . . *Jen* and *I* are terms with definite unchangeable meanings. . . . The belittling of *Jen* and *I* by Lao-tzu cannot destroy these two ideas; it shows instead the narrowness of Lao-tzu's vision.*

In effect, he stated that the moral truth had been perverted, that both Buddhism and Taoism denied humanity, righteousness, decent social relationships, and that which was immutably Chinese. From a modern point of view he was a moralist member of the old guard, a reforming fundamentalist pressing for a return to the simple and workable concepts and precepts of the past. The avenues to this past he conceived in terms of a literary renaissance based on the ancient style.

In his own time Han Yü was a magnificent stylist whose force and clarity gained him an audience. He had great courage, for his opposition to Buddhism cost him his rank and position. He was open-minded enough to study Buddhism (which he detested) and Taoism in order to combat them, far-seeing enough to want Confucianism to be more than a crutch to power, idealistic enough to want it to be an enduring way of life, and supple enough to agree that tradition must be adapted to conditions. But the rejuvenation of an antique ethic needed more than the polemics of Han

* C. Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), p. 92.

Yü. It needed philosophers. Li Ao, a follower of Han Yü, was the most important of the new Confucianists. He agreed with Han Yü that one should return to the Classics themselves and abandon the intervening commentaries.

Li Ao tried to meet the demands of the new age by tying the Confucian social ethic to a metaphysic that explicated human nature, enlightenment, nature, and the universe on equal rhetorical terms with Buddhism and Taoism. This he did to a large extent by transposing Buddhist and Taoist concepts into pure Confucian classical terminology, arriving at an ethical reality that could be attained by the contemplative mind in combination with a life of action. With Li Ao begins the merging of thought and action that was to broaden out in the next three centuries into a spectrum of learning called Neo-Confucianism.

Not all T'ang Confucianists were as able as Han Yü and Li Ao. Some were pure reactionaries, nationalistic haters of things foreign. Some simply called for a blind duty to the throne, others elevated Confucius as a sort of heavenly father. But the entire T'ang ferment of thought was stimulating fresh inquiry into the nature of man and the universe, and slowly Lao-tzu was to slip out of the curriculum while a man who had been neglected for centuries, Mencius, was revived.

END OF THE HOUSE OF LI

Once the Buddhist church was expropriated and the proceeds distributed, there remained no further single great source of income for the government to tap. The late T'ang emperors lived a hand-to-mouth existence, temporizing with provincial viceroys, at odds with their military and civil officials, detested by the dwindling aristocracy, and supported only by their eunuchs.

The last vestiges of true central rule occurred under Wu-tsung (840–846) and Prince Kuang, his successor, and this came about largely through events that began far north of China. In 840 the Kirghiz of the upper reaches of the Enisei River broke the Uigurs in battle and captured the chief Uigur encampment on the Orkhon River. The mass of the Uigur tribes moved southward to the Great Wall and, more from hunger than from enmity, began to raid Chinese territory. In 843 they were routed by a Chinese

army, a victory that brought the dynasty a last phase of military authority, since the frontier troops could then be withdrawn to reinforce the capital army. This authority enabled Prince Kuang to override the eunuchs, but it was a temporary reprieve.

The stroke that finally brought down the dynasty came from the south. The army of China, long stationed in the tropics of Annam, without relief and without pay, mutinied in 868 and fought and looted their way home. This touched off the long-anticipated civil war in eastern China. Almost a century of rebellions and war had ruined the peasantry of the region, and they were ripe for an uprising. The trouble was accentuated by drought and famine in Honan in 873. The government factions, busy quarreling among themselves (an eleven-year-old child was emperor), were unable to cope with the famine or the resultant banditry in the lower Yellow River regions. In 874 an unemployed scholar, Huang-ch'ao, organized the various bandit gangs into a popular army of rebellion, which by 881 had moved south as far as Canton, destroying that city and its Moslem community. It retraced its steps to take Loyang and Chang-an, where Huang-ch'ao proclaimed himself emperor. The dynasty, beset by disagreements with its military commanders, managed to assemble a loyal force, largely with the help of the Shato Turks of the Ordos. Chang-an was sacked three times within the year, the third time by Huang-ch'ao in angry revenge against the inhabitants, who had welcomed the earlier victory of the loyal forces. But in 883 Huang-ch'ao was defeated again and fled into obscurity.

The last T'ang emperors lived in a ruined city at the mercy of their general officers and presided over a country where every provincial governor and garrison commander treated his area as an independent fief. Meanwhile the Shato allies seized Shansi as their reward. The last of the house of Li was forced to abdicate in 904 by a general, and for the next fifty-three years North China came under a series of ephemeral military dictatorships, while the southern governors set themselves up as small kingdoms.

The Chinese call this the time of the Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms, and have paid little attention to it save as a brief, chaotic period between T'ang and Sung. Yet it was a period that gave the succeeding dynasty much of its shape and form. During

these fifty-odd years China remained culturally unified and much of it remained at peace. But power was fragmented among a number of short-lived, regional war-lord regimes, to the point where an almost obsessive desire for political reunification arose. When a central government was re-established, it came about by means of a consensus rather than an upheaval.

[25]

The Diminished Empire

The maturation and modernization of Chinese thought and institutions, a flowering from the T'ang seedbed, took place from the tenth to the thirteenth century within a shrunken country stripped of empire and subject to constant humiliations. A new dynasty, the Sung, deliberately restrained China from the old familiar imperial war footing with a combination of realism and idealism, maintaining an absolute civil supremacy over the military by an effective system of checks and balances. The voluntary relinquishment of a significant part of the north was based on the realization by most of the Sung rulers that an attempt to reclaim those lands from the northern peoples would upset the tenuous political and economic stability the dynasty had achieved. Those few Sung rulers who dreamed of reconquering the north came later in the dynasty and had forgotten what war could do to a civilization.

The diminished empire, from 960 to its end in 1235, matured in scientific concepts, literary and artistic sophistication, techniques of personnel administration, and philosophic thought, while the economy and society became heavily urban and commercial. The condition of peace meant not the end of armies, but a large, inefficient army. The only attempt made during Sung to reorganize

and modernize the armies failed of its purpose. In general, the peace of Sung depended upon skillful diplomacy. To understand many of the internal problems, disputations, reforms, and growths of the Sung era, it is necessary first to have an overview of the conditions of the times.

The Sung era marks the rise of the northern peoples. The Turks were replaced by the Khitan, Tangut, Ju-chen, Mongol, and Manchu peoples. At the same time China became South China, a land of great wealth and population, rich in urban life and in a type of commerce and production alien to the old north. China's center of gravity had been moving slowly for centuries. It shifted again between the time of the Talas disaster in 751 and the creation of the Hsi-Hsia state in 982.

In 959 the ruler of that part of northern China where the fiction of a dynastic succession to the T'ang was still preserved, if only by force of arms, died in his palace at Kaifeng. The capital had been moved there from Chang-an in 936, to take advantage of easier provisioning and to escape the pressures of the Tibetans, who had, very late in T'ang, taken over Kansu. The succession of this dynasty (Later Chou) then passed to an infant and an empress regnant. The army, unhappy at this turn of events, declared their commander in chief, Chao K'uang-yin, as emperor in the most praetorian manner. He accepted in return for their pledge that they would obey him. Kaifeng was bloodlessly occupied, and Later Chou disappeared as Chao K'uang-yin was proclaimed Sung T'ai Tsu, first emperor of a new dynasty, the Sung.

He shared that streak of perspicacity and organizational genius that seems to mark the first rulers of all great Chinese dynasties. Although he had been elevated at swords' points, he did not propose to rest the future of his house on military force. He quickly established his true nature and the character of his dynasty by demobilization and reorganization of the army. Also, in an enormously wise and mature move, he drew toward him the kingdoms of the south, which enabled him to unite and strengthen China by conciliation.

A significant part of the north had to be abandoned. The removal of the capital to Kaifeng meant that China's northern marches lay across the Yellow River and not along the Great Wall.

Kaifeng, a great walled and moated city with vermilion gates, was on a plain protected to the north by the Yellow River, to the west by the defenses of Loyang, and to the east by the barrier of Shang-chiu. The Khitan of the Liao state were willing to live in peace with the Chinese, and T'ai Tsu had the sense to accept this while he consolidated North and South China. In the fifteen years after his accession the southern kingdoms came into the fold, and by 971 Kaifeng was the capital of a united but feeble China.

The second Sung emperor, T'ai-tsung, was not as capable as his brother, T'ai Tsu. He suffered a bad defeat at the hands of the Khitan in 986, and peace did not come again to the north until the treaty of 1004. From then on, the basic policy of Sung alternated between tribute and resistance, according to which served best at any moment. In carrying on such a tricky policy, a new kind of army was used, the Imperial Guards.

THE NEW ARMY

The frontier armies and separate regional garrisons of the past centuries were gone. T'ai Tsu's remarkable agreement with his commanders—he himself had been a commander—enabled him to absorb all military forces into the Guards, the whole being under the imperial command, which was assured by stationing half the Guards in the capital district. Thus military power at the center of authority was balanced with that in the rest of China. The army was supported by a labor corps and a general militia, organized as a home guard for local trouble. There was no conscription. The Sung army was a professional one, small at the beginning, consisting of about 200,000 men, and not a drain on the weak economy. Eighty years after T'ai Tsu it had risen greatly in numbers (estimated at 1,400,000) but not in efficiency. It was well organized and well armed but poorly paid and ill-disciplined. The larger it became the weaker it seemed to be.

There were those patriots who saw little sense in having a large and expensive army that could not fight, and as to what it was to fight for, save exhausting barbarian wars, no one could tell. Then in 1038 the system was called to account with the outbreak of wars in the north, and it became quite evident that a huge

SIBERIA
Enisei R.
Altai Mts.
Karakorum
Orkhon R.
Kerulen R.
Sungari R.
MANCHURIA
Liaoyang
Liao R.
Yalu R.
Ferghana
Urumchi
Karashahr
Kashgar
Hami
MONGOLIA
CHAHAR
Shang-tu
JEHOL
KOGURYU
Tarim Basin
Takalamakan Desert
Khotan
K'un-lun-shan Range
KASHMIR
NINGSIA
Ordos Desert
Reking
GULF OF CHIHLI
SILLA
PAEKCHE
SUIYUAN
HOPEI
Nan-shan Range
KANSU
SHANTUNG
Kaifeng
Yellow R.
Chang-an
Loyang
Yang-chow
Huai R.
Nanking
Yangtze R.
Hangchow
TIBET
SZECHUAN
CHEKIANG
KIANGSI
Nan-chao
Ch'uan-chou
Tali
Canton
Zayton
NAM VIET
ANNAM
THE SUNG ERA
Great Wall
Northern boundary of Southern Sung after 1127

military establishment was not the same as an effective one. Soon after came an attempt to reverse the policy of T'ai Tsu.

The emperor at that time, Shen Tsung, and his prime minister, Wang An-shih, undertook a series of wide-reaching reforms, beginning in 1050, which included the building of a powerful national army to save the state. The objective was a good, small professional army backed by a vast militia, trained annually in the countryside, and organized on a basis of units of ten, fifty, and five hundred families. At the height of these reforms millions of men were receiving annual training in preparation for the reintroduction of militia conscription. Since war horses were necessary (and to relieve the government of its dependence on the nomad studs), government co-operatives were established along the Yellow River for breeding them. Finally, instead of rotating regional and provincial garrisons, Wang An-shih proposed to establish permanent garrisons, each of which was to serve as a training cadre for the militia in its locality.

The reasoning behind the reforms was sound. The use of mercenaries was proving to be unwise. They were recruited from the dregs of the population and were despised, therefore, by both their commands and the people of China. The term of service was for life, but after a reasonable time a man was of no military use, only drawing his pay and rations and swelling the ranks of idle men. The constant shifting of troops and commanders to prevent undue political influence led to slackness in discipline. Above all, a paid army, even poorly paid, was proving to be an enormous drain on the treasury, taking about 80 percent of the state's revenues. The reintroduction of the unpaid conscript, facilities for raising war horses and more permanent commands, all made sense. However, the people resented the forced drill and training, and there was official opposition to the revival of the militia system, ostensibly on ethical grounds, but it is more than possible that the landlords were horrified by the organization of a government-armed peasantry.

Unfortunately these military reforms were the cornerstone of an attempt at radical fiscal, administrative, and political revisions, which met with a storm of even greater opposition. The new military measures were in force barely twenty-five years before they

were abandoned, and China remained militarily weak but fortunately at peace. Then, at the start of the twelfth century, the friendly Liao were gradually being driven out of their lands by their vassals, the tough Ju-chen from the Sungari River. At this point the emperor, Hui Tsung, made a gross mistake. While the Liao were friendly they were also expensive, and for years they had been bought off by the Sung state. In an effort to end this expense, and with the laudable ambition of trying to recover the old T'ang lands south of the Wall, Hui Tsung made an alliance with those terrible fighters the Ju-chen, and the combined forces drove out the Liao.

Hui Tsung, whose army had been weakened in the war, now ended the subsidy normally paid to occupiers of the north and tried to regain the territory by raising the local Chinese population against the Ju-chen. He miscalculated the strength and fury of the Ju-chen, who pressed into China while the demoralized Sung troops fled or surrendered. Hui Tsung acknowledged his error and abdicated in favor of his son, who offered a huge indemnity if the invaders would return north. Then the original error was compounded. The new emperor was persuaded to break his word and attack the Ju-chen as they withdrew. This time the nomads took Kaifeng (1126–1127) and captured both emperors. Hui Tsung spent the remaining years of his life in exile in Manchuria. The capital was hastily moved to Nanking and then to Hangchow (1132), where a brother of the exiles became emperor. Sung became Southern Sung, while China, from the Huai valley to the Wall, was ruled by the Ju-chen under the dynastic name Chin, with their capital at Peking.

SOUTHERN SUNG

For the next seventy years Southern Sung was at peace. The army degenerated, but the best defenses were the wooded river valleys of South China, which made cavalry warfare most difficult. Furthermore, a navy was created. With the new capital a port city, controlling a well-harbored coast with a skilled maritime population and sealed off from the land routes, Southern Sung turned to the sea, from which came a substantial portion of its income through trade. Ships, fitted out with missile-launchers,

flame-throwers, and bombs, kept the coasts and seas clear of enemies. Hangchow, well protected by lakes and streams, grew from a small river port to the political, administrative, and commercial center of Sung China and the greatest city in the world, although to the Chinese government it always remained the "temporary capital" Hsing-tsai (the *Quinsai* of Messer Marco Polo). It governed 90 percent of the Chinese population in sixteen provinces, whose 60 million inhabitants were spread across more than a thousand miles from east to west, linked to each other by the great river and canal systems and to the world by the great ports. The push to the west had been stopped by the nomad seizures, and the continual push southward was now blocked by the rise of Nan-chao, Ta-li, and Vietnam, so the Chinese turned to an intensive development of coastal and interior South China.

A vast economic change took place, marked by the growth of real cities (not merely military and administrative centers), a money and credit system, which gave rise to more widespread wealth, and a strong contrast between the prosperity of the great cities and towns and the masses of the country and urban poor. It was an age of freedom for the Chinese commercial instinct, and in the richest and largest city of the world, Hangchow, life for the favored was good and agreeably leisured.

Southern Sung is a well-documented period of Chinese history, and we have an excellent idea of what life in those times was really like. We know of the traveling merchants; the begging friars; a rising business class, whose second generation strove for social respectability; peasants trudging to the cities for opportunity; the large, prosperous section of the urban population, whose wealth and success was frowned upon by the conservative scholars; the aristocracy, predominantly from the Yangtze delta; wealthy landowners with intimate connections with the government; the family of the emperor and the imperial favorites; the meritorious scholars; and the high officials.

The aristocracy, including the civil servants, numbered perhaps not more than sixty thousand. They were immune from the ordinary processes of the law, influential in affairs, and controlled very great wealth. It differed from previous Chinese aristocracies inasmuch as it included the vastly wealthy merchants. Also, it was

less hierarchal, more given to despair, and at the same time more amenable to pleasure.

We know less of the peasant in the countryside, the rich literature of Sung being a record of the towns and cities. We can infer that the constant expedients of Southern Sung government to restore agricultural production—laws on military farm settlements, tax exemptions, the sale of public lands, and even the confiscation of land from the rich—were evidently to no avail. Life on the farm was precarious, for the costs of the state, of the army, and now of the cities bore heavily on the income of the land through taxes and rents. One mark of this is the flow of peasants to the town, not only tenants, but small proprietors, farm workers, and those who eked out existences on state enterprises such as the salt industry of the Huai valley. Good years were thin ones, and the years of bad crops made life a hell. The average expected interest rate on crop loans was 60 to 240 percent, and the result was what anyone familiar with Chinese history might expect: a floating population in the countryside of local bandits and tramps, the abandonment of marginal farms, the sale of children. The masses of the towns were poor enough before they became crowded with countrymen selling their strong backs or agile wits in order to live. Some made their livelihood from the rich, since each household of any standing had to have its retinue of hangers-on and servants. Some lived by charity, for in Sung there were many private and official charitable institutions (stimulated by Buddhism), and the wealthy matched their extravagance with charity. Finally there were those at the bottom of the heap, heavy laborers and children sold into domestic service or state enterprises.

The adult population was controlled, as nearly as can be determined from the few surviving legal documents, by merciless law administered by the local magistrate. In a Confucian society no well-adjusted citizen ran afoul of the law, and therefore any accusation was *per se* a matter of guilt. Beating and torture were freely used, because no one could be convicted until he had admitted his guilt. Severe interrogation was the norm of criminal procedure, and justice as such was generally an adjunct to the police-secured tranquility of the countryside. The mitigating fac-

tor was the reviewing power that a strong government held over the magistrates. Serious cases were always reviewed by higher officials, and in the event of error the magistrate responsible was punished in accord with the degree of his injustice. "The law is inviolable but not the judge who enacted it," the code said.*

Some of these factors can be seen in the following:

> In the time of Shih-tsung (954–959 A.D.) of the (Later) Chou Dynasty (915–960 A.D.), when Kao Fang was Prefect of Ts'ai-chou, a man of that place called Wang I was robbed with violence. Five men were arrested, put in prison and thoroughly interrogated. When the stolen goods were indeed found with them all five confessed and were going to be submitted to the supreme penalty. Kao Fang, however, had the stolen goods brought and examined them. Summoning Wang I he asked him whether the garments he had lost were made out of one piece of cloth or not. Wang I stated that they had been made out of one piece. Then Kao Fang had the size and texture of the component parts of the recovered garments checked and found that they were different. The prisoners then declared that they had been falsely accused. When Kao Fang asked them why they had confessed, they stated that they had been unable to withstand the flogging, and only had desired to die quickly. After a few days the real robber was apprehended and the five men were acquitted.†

THE NEW COMMERCIAL ECONOMY

The strength of the economy came from the fruitful south, the great Yangtze valley, the network of canals, the seaports of South China (and the development of chart and compass), the spread of credit, the wide use of negotiable paper, and above all, the state direction of economic life. The state now regulated the economy almost beyond the visions of past Legalists and was the greatest merchant in China. The old payments-in-kind were abandoned in favor of money payments. Taking a leaf from the military bosses of the Five Dynasties period, who had derived their money from taxes on commerce and not on land, the Sung had come to depend heavily on the transactions tax. At the beginning

* R. H. Van Gulik, *T'ang Yin Pi Shih* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), p. 62.
† *Ibid.*, p. 119.

of the dynasty, the cities had been exempted from mercantile taxes in order to gain the favor of the populace, and a mere 3 percent sales tax was levied on merchants. But in Southern Sung, the drying-up of tax sources and the increasing malfeasance and misfeasance of tax officials led to heavy taxation of trade and commerce. Since the tax collectors were evaluated by the amount of taxes they collected and had to supplement their pay by bribery, heavy taxes became inordinate taxes. Merchants who did not go out of business stayed alive either through a corrupt alliance with tax collectors or by squeezing out their smaller competitors. This led to great merchant monopolies.

While hard money was in common use, the basic unit, a string of one thousand copper coins (any number down to one was used in private transactions, although the single copper was of infinitesimal value) was so bulky that the old T'ang note of credit, based on a deposit of coins, came into wide use. Both the state and private firms issued such letters of credit, and they were the main form of payment for goods received.

The state monopolized salt, tea, and alcohol. But the state as regulator not only produced goods, it licensed the right to make, distribute, or sell a number of products (this became the greatest single means of mercantile fortunes), and in these cases, where it took no proximate interest in the trade, it taxed it. In accord with this domination of the economy, the state was the chief moneylender, setting interest rates and, as in T'ang, prohibiting usury except for state practice. It regulated the craft and mercantile guilds, forcing them to supply the state on its own terms. Also, a substantial portion of the buildings of the great cities were government-owned. Through its constant intervention in the economy, the state inadvertently created for a small part of Chinese society a wealth so great that this group was able to beggar China by living beyond its means.

All these riches were envied by the upper classes, whose holdings were in land. They were forbidden to engage in commerce, so they went into the complex of retail and wholesale businesses under assumed names, often through a younger son who had failed to make the civil service. In return, they permitted the merchants to ease the way for *their* sons—by purchasing land

through some petty device—and thus future generations could rise above their forefathers. The merchants were tolerated as a part of the economic aristocracy, but the gentry still despised them, despite those of their number who, in the race for wealth, had joined hands with merchants, and the gentry officials who actually took bribes to recommend merchants for office.

Finally, there was the sea trade carried on through the Arabs, who controlled the Indian Ocean and whose depots and factories were at the ports of Canton (*Khanfu* or *Kanpu* to the Arabs), Hangchow, Ch'uan-chou, Yang-chou in Kiangsu, and Chia-chou in Kwangtung. The central port was Ch'uan-chou (the Arab's Zayton). The Arabs lived comfortably in their quarters, got along well with the Chinese, and were even permitted to try their own culprits by Moslem law. The voyage from the China coast to the Middle East and back took two years, and while the sailors were Arabs, the ship was generally the well-constructed Chinese sea-going junk. A footnote to the Arab trade in China is that the ships also used Negro seamen and carried Negro slaves to China. (Negroes from Africa and from the East Indies were familiar in China from the fourth century.) In exchange for the information the Chinese gleaned from the Arabs about the rest of the world, the Arabs learned about the compass needle.

A rich urban and intellectual life flourished in the last reigns of the dynasty, but at the same time the nation was going bankrupt (with less than half the income of its predecessors, the Southern Sung maintained an armed force of over a million and a half), and it was also degenerating politically through factional strife and petty misrule.

Then the errors of Hui Tsung were repeated. In 1147 the Chin state was under great pressure from the Mongols and tended to become quite conciliatory to China. In 1207 Genghis Khan launched a two-pronged attack against the Hsi-Hsia and the Chin states. By 1227 the Hsi-Hsia were exterminated or driven out, and Kansu and Ningsia so badly devastated they never recovered. The Chin asked the Southern Sung for help, reminding them, "We are to you as the lips to the teeth. When the lips are gone the teeth will feel the cold." The emperor responded by sending an army to help the Mongols. Then he ordered this army to reoccupy

North China—that is, to take it away from the most formidable war organization in the world. "The teeth" became very cold as this action exposed Southern Sung to a relentless enemy.

From 1225 to 1279 the Mongols fought their way through central and southern China, first under Mangu Khan and then under Kublai Khan. To do this, they had to abandon cavalry, learn seige and infantry warfare, and turn from a nation of archers to a nation of seamen. The last Sung forces were driven to the sea off Canton, and in the ensuing fight the last Sung claimant was drowned. For the first time in its history China was wholly in the hands of a foreign conqueror.

The three centuries of shrinking frontiers had had somewhat the effect of a pressure cooker on Chinese civilization. The basic Sung option for a Little China turned all the forces of Chinese life inward rather than spilling them out in a struggle for the northern plains. What Sung lost in errors of judgment, China gained in maturity.

[26]

A Century of Reform and Reaction

The reunification of the Chinese state, the withdrawal from militarism as a national policy, the supremacy of civil administration, the clement nature and maturity of the first Sung emperors had not solved China's persistent economic crisis nor prepared it for the profound changes it was to undergo between the tenth and twelfth centuries. A vast struggle over acceptance and control of these changes marks the social, political, and economic history of the eleventh century.

Emperor T'ai Tsu was tough and able. He listened to his ministers, understood the public point of view, made his own decisions, and delegated authority. He set a pattern of imperial absolutism in Chinese rule partly through establishing civil supremacy and partly through the deliberate centralization of power in the throne. Dynastic authority was tempered by creation of a true service bureaucracy, which recruited men of the highest attainments and gave them a good deal of subordinate authority. The service was monitored not only by its superiors, however, but also by the censors and the palace secret police. The authority and autonomy of regional and provincial officials was sharply

reduced. A system of checks and balances prevented any single official from acquiring undue power, save from the emperor himself, and even the ministers of government yielded independent jurisdiction over their own separate affairs to a superior executive body.

There was no longer any prime minister as such; rather there were two councils of state, each reporting to the throne through an interlocking State Council. The Privy Council deliberated military matters. The Administrative Council was a general policy board in nonmilitary matters. Each council had a chairman and one or more vice-chairmen. The Administrative Council supervised the work of three chief administrative organs: the Chancellery (in effect a prime minister's office), the Executive Office, and the Secretariat. The Secretariat and the Executive Office oversaw the work of the various ministries of government. A separate Board of Finance reported directly to the throne, and the Censorate was independent even of the emperor.

The entire structure was headed by a State Council, on which sat members of the Privy and Administrative councils and the heads of the ministries, completing the large, complex, highly centralized reservoir of absolute power.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

During the Sung dynasty the T'ang concept of a civil service chosen on merit by examination, which would free the throne of any dependence on a hereditary landed class, was refined into an instrument of administration that lasted until 1904. Although the first good evidence for the origins of administrative officials comes from the twelfth century, it is safe to assume that the Sung civil service drew a substantial number of its men from families with no previous tradition of public service. As candidates, these men had gone through all or part of the quadruple stages of examination—district annual, provincial triennial, capital triennial, and occasional imperial—and, save for unusual cases, had awaited their appointment along with thousands of other degree-holders in the capital. Once appointed, the candidate was a member of a proud service, but he had inadequate compensation and no hope of retirement income (it was assumed that children took care of

their parents). He was then often forced to exist through what today we would call corruption but what, under the circumstances, can more fairly be called the inevitable perquisites of such a system. This, of course, tended to place private interests over official commitments, and to this degree, the service was stripped of professionalism.

The most dangerous pressure on the efficiency of the Chinese civil service was this: under Confucianism the bureaucracy was the only arena for political discussion and therefore the only force countervailing the power of the monarch. It often had the impossible task of operating both as the government and as the loyal opposition. What we have here is the paradox of a completely nonpolitical group having to function politically. This it did through factionalism. The dangers involved were intense because of the peculiar nature of this kind of factionalism. Systematic heterodox ideologies being forbidden, the factional opposition to men's ideas was not ideological but *ad hominem*, and bureaucratic politics was nasty and often fatal to careers.

When factions quarreled, the result was conformity with the views of the victors—they could dismiss teachers, outlaw writings, punish students, and demote, dismiss, or banish officials. With no absolute tenure and with thousands of competing jobseekers, officials played it safe even when they knew better. So did candidates, and this led toward examinations more notable for their caution than their searching qualities. There were safeguards—examiners read the recopied papers of anonymous examinees, and the emperor himself made the appointments—but no guarantee that excellent men would be permitted to use their minds and talents. This was well known, so educated men practiced the dexterous artificial styles of the difficult and allusive classical tests, at the same time getting a real education on the side. As it was said, "One can study for the examinations in the daytime and read the books one wants to at night." It was this kind of thing that officials like Wang An-shih thought absurd and unprofessional, because it turned geniuses into pedants. This was his view:

> I deny that the system is a good one. For a system which compels a man in the best of his life, when he ought to be studying the fundamental principles of political thought and administration, to

> shut himself up in his room and devote all his time and energies to the making of poetry and the composition of rhyming couplets is of necessity detrimental. For such a man entering upon the duties of official life will have been denied all chance of gaining that knowledge that would be of practical value to him in his work.*

Men played this game, for not to have done so would have meant neglecting their families and their social duty, which was "to study, to get the metropolitan degree, to become an official, to become wealthy." Everyone, statesman as well as student, found the system wanting, but the entire institution flourished. Regardless of cumulative inefficiencies, a bureaucracy will expand and perpetuate itself. No empirical investigation will show this, because the bureaucracy sets its own criteria of efficiency when it investigates itself.

In this instance, where no avenues for fundamental institutional changes were open, improvements had to come through disruptive factional struggles. Factions within the service were nothing new, but during periods of great change they could produce governmental paralysis. Genuine reforms were often blocked by an opposing faction labeling them treasonable. Single institutional reforms—as in the tax system or in education—were extremely difficult to consider on their merits alone, and fundamental general reform was evidently impossible. The only way in which a reforming faction could carry through its ideas was to gain both the support of the greatest power in China, the emperor, and the sanction of the Classics, the latter being the greater challenge. During Northern Sung neither a literal reading nor accepted interpretations seemed to offer any solution to the problems of livelihood and defense. But in this century a group of remarkable scholar-officials applied their minds and energies to programs of fundamental reform within a genuine and allowable interpretation of Confucian principles.

The recognized need for reforms began to take shape early in Sung, with the establishment after 1033 of a national school system. Each prefecture and district set up private and public

* H. Williamson, *Wang An-Shih* (London: Probsthain, 1935), Vol. I, p. 338 (modified by Callis).

schools to train men for the civil service. The examination system was briefly revamped, so that history and politics were made a significant part of the final exams, the Classics retained their due share of attention, and the composition of poetry was downgraded. The instigator of these changes, the minister Fan Chung-yen, later fell from favor, and with him departed the changes in the examinations, but after his time memorial after memorial was submitted to the throne urging the recruitment of able men, the upgrading and tightening of the civil service, the conservation of resources, the equalization of landholdings, the end of graft and nepotism, the reduction of taxes and labor services.

It takes an extraordinarily courageous and powerful man to rearrange an ancient ethic through swift and positive reforms, but Wang An-shih, one of the greatest literary men and possibly the greatest public official of the Sung dynasty, was equal to the task. A descendant of prosperous farmers of Kiangsi, he had passed his examinations with distinction, and in minor posts between 1042 and 1060 he had earned respect and had given some indication of his temperament by suppressing usury, lending grain to the needy, and instituting farm improvements. In 1060 he spent a brief period on the Board of Finance at the capital, where he met important men, became acquainted with the grievous economic problems of China, and presented a famous memorial to the throne on the need for good men in the civil service. In 1069 he became a privy councilor, and over the next seven years instituted a series of measures that have been subjects of controversy from his time until now. The Sung histories were compiled by men unsympathetic to Wang's aims, and almost all aspects of his life were subjected to hostile interpretations. Even the fact that from the ages of twenty-one to forty-six he refused promotion, preferring to remain a rural magistrate, has been attributed to gross hypocrisy by his enemies, who insist he bided his time in order to gain power and favor. His supporters claim that he sacrificed advancement in order to care for his aged mother. Even in our times the study of this powerful statesman-reformer of eleventh-century China tends to become blurred by all kinds of contemporary "isms." It is evident that the "new laws" of Sung must be viewed within the context of their own times.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

We have seen that the economic and social crisis that had marked the last century of T'ang was not repaired by the Sung dynasty. To create a broad base of prosperity that would help both the people and the state and to revise fiscal policies were Wang An-shih's objectives. The south of China, the lower Yangtze valley, was now the most important economic and political region of the state. Trade and commerce in this region and in other parts of China were playing more important roles than ever before. But there was persistent agricultural depression. For one hundred and fifty years rural bankruptcy had been on the rise. The small farmers were dispossessed and driven off the land to become the tenant of the large manor owner. The constant military uncertainties drained workers from the fields and spurred settlement in the Yangtze area. Military expeditions and the barbarian tribute imposed heavy tax burdens.

The first century of the Sung dynasty brought stability, but on the land it was the stability of permanent poverty. Much of the farm population lived from hand to mouth, constantly in debt and on the brink of famine. A caprice of nature could push whole provinces into disaster at any season. The peacetime population expansion exceeded the rise in per capita production. New strains of rice had been introduced from Indochina that took only three months to ripen as against nine months for the old varieties, enabling double cropping. Being hardy and drought-resistant, they permitted the opening of poor land and upland. Despite the granting of generous tax relief and the encouragement of new farming practices, the steadily increasing farm population was cultivating decreased median holdings and paying exorbitant interest rates.

The visible evidence of a sick agriculture was the decline in taxes, but this was masked by the prosperity of urban areas. The Five Dynasties period had given a thrust to regional specializations, and this led, often through mercantile monopolies, to great wealth such as was amassed by the rice and salt factors of Szechuan, the sea merchants of Chekiang, or the porcelain manufacturers of the southeast. The onset of this large-scale trade

produced the revenues that helped pay off the Khitans, and it provided amenities for those riding the boom. At the same time it inflated industrial prices, depressed commodity prices, encouraged estate consolidation and tenancy, and in general presented the traditionally underpaid officialdom with the unwelcome prospects of a rising merchant capitalism.

It was this situation that Wang An-shih attempted to revise during his lifetime in office.

> I am not arguing that we should revive the ancient system of government in every detail. The most ignorant can see that a great interval of time separates us from those days, and our country has passed through so many vicissitudes since then that present conditions differ greatly. So a complete revival is practically impossible. I suggest that we should just follow the main ideas and general principles of these ancient rulers. Let us recall the fact that we are separated from the rule of these great men by over a thousand years of history; that they had their periods of progress and decline; that their difficulties and circumstances differed greatly. But although the methods they devised and adopted to meet their various circumstances varied in character, they were at one in the motives which actuated them, and in their observance of the relative importance of affairs. Therefore I contend that we needed only to follow their principles. I believe that if that could be done, the changes and reforms that would ensue would not unduly alarm the people, or excite undue opposition, but would in the end bring the government of our day into line with that of the Golden Age.*

THE REFORMS OF WANG AN-SHIH

Wang An-shih's grand design was to increase the national income and manage it more wisely in order to strengthen the nation against the dangers of barbarian attack and internal distress. His plan of military reorganization has been described in the preceding chapter. Another, administrative reform, is discussed in the section following this. The economic reforms were as follows:

State control of enterprise including agriculture: These laws

* *Ibid.*, p. 50.

and regulations were designed to increase farm income and to relieve the small farmer, trader, and craftsman of the hardships resulting from fluctuations in crop yields and market demands and the operations of usurers and speculators. New land surveys were ordered so that each landowner could be assessed on the basis of what he actually owned, not what the old land registers showed. Measures were taken to abolish forced labor and get farmers back on their own land. The farm loan act of 1069 allowed a farmer to obtain a loan in the spring from the government at 20 percent interest (as against the usual 50 percent), and a local group of ten farmers guaranteed to repay the loan with interest in the fall harvest season. Through these means the government hoped for a solid and permanent tax base, to say nothing of the additional income from the interest on the loans. The farm loan act struck at the landlords, for it separated their money-lending function from their land-ownership and thereby greatly loosened their control over the farmers. Unfortunately the interest on loans was a signal source of income for local officials, who put heavy pressure on farmers to take loans. Since a substantial number could not repay, their land was expropriated by the lender—the state. Here the idealism of Wang An-shih did not penetrate to the local officials; the state simply superseded the individual as usurer.

An equitable tax and price system: The list of taxable properties was broadened and many traditional exemptions struck down. All real and personal property had to be declared for tax purposes. Labor service was abandoned in favor of taxes in money or kind. Retail prices were regulated by the state, which at the same time acted as lender to merchants upon the security of their stocks and properties. One important measure provided for the state to purchase surplus commodities, store and sell them locally, and remit the money to the capital. This eliminated the long haul of tax grain, stabilized prices, and kept grain stocks locally available in event of food shortages.

The farm loans and the mercantile loans seem to be the axis of the "new laws." The government was the greatest customer in China. It also had a moral responsibility to the producer. If it could control credit, it could eliminate the nonproductive middle-

man who took profit through usury, monopoly, and speculation.

The combined opposition of those who disliked some of the "new laws" plus those who disliked all of them resulted in the resignation of Wang An-shih and the reversal of his economic policies. China was not yet ready for a true money and credit economy, certainly not for a revision of the ancient grain-tax system that would eliminate the need for the huge substructure of human labor on which the traditional gentry depended. Nor were the gentry disposed to go along with laws that would stimulate mercantilism or, by diverting capital from land to production, divest them of their traditional source of income and power. It is doubtful that anyone foresaw the ultimate effect of the "new laws" if they had remained in force. For example, the ancient customary obligations of all classes of society to perform some free service for the state were put on a salaried basis by Wang An-shih, and exemptions could be bought. This "Dispatched Services Act" plus the new tax and credit laws reduced the obligations of the people to pay taxes and do military service. If these policies had continued, they would have freed Chinese economic and social life to an extent unprecedented in the eleventh century world and opened the way for political changes that can only be imagined.

THE TRIUMPH OF ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITION

The laws of Wang An-shih that aroused the fiercest enmity within the bureaucracy were sweeping administrative and educational reforms. In the main these were designed to raise the educational level of recruits, stress the study of politics, end corruption by decent pay, and ensure that no scholar received a post simply because he was a scholar. This kind of approach involved new interpretations of tradition, not the least of which was the shifting of emphasis in education from classical studies to current events and ideas. These measures, too, were to be reversed.

Although Wang An-shih was forced to retire in 1076 and devoted the remainder of his days to literary study, his general reforms remained in effect during the lifetime of his patron, Emperor Shen Tsung. When Shen Tsung died in 1085, the new

emperor, Chi Tsung, was only a boy, and his grandmother, the regent, revoked the entire program. On her death in 1093, Chi Tsung restored the reforms. He was succeeded in 1100 by his young brother, Hui Tsung, who was erratic, superstitious, and dominated by an unscrupulous and vengeful minister, Ts'ai Ching. Ts'ai Ching continued the "new laws" only insofar as they could contribute to his own emoluments. He twisted them out of recognition, and it is possible that this was the cause for some of the later distaste for Wang An-shih's ideas. However, it is important to consider that powerful, logical, and articulate opposition came during Wang's own tenure of office.

There is no doubt Wang An-shih honestly tried to serve the best interests of the Chinese state as he saw them. His opponents were equally critical of many existing evils and also desired reform. But they wanted to proceed cautiously, calling for change within tradition. Wang was for full steam ahead, calling for change consonant with not the letter but the spirit of tradition. His enemies conceded his brilliance and his honesty, but like his greatest rival, the historian-statesman Ssu-ma Kuang, found him a "very self-willed man."

> He could not brook opposition [Ssu-ma Kuang continued]. He was so convinced that his own ideas were right that he would hold them tenaciously against all opposition. He had remarkable ideas and unusual powers of rhetoric, which helped him to further his political theories. He was convinced that he ought to reform the character and customs of his age.*

The struggle was more, however, than a dispute between stubborn and ambitious men or between conservators and innovators. It was a fight to the death between very powerful policy factions over how and to what extent the commonly recognized need for the modernization and strengthening of the Chinese state should proceed. Whether the changes should be slow or swift was subordinate to whether they should affect men or institutions. Those committed to traditional interpretations of Confucianism desired to leave the institutions intact and make

* *Ibid.*, p. 33.

them work better through better men. They believed that the perfectibility of men was possible by way of a self-disciplining, self-examining education, and that moral men made for good government. Wang and his adherents were also for the moral order, but they believed that institutions furnished the behavioral models through which man and the moral order were perfected.

In addition, the opposition wanted to preserve those traditional roles, rites, and situations without which the meaning of all government, in the Confucian sense, collapses, while the proponents of the "new laws" regarded the modernization of these elements as absolutely necessary for efficient government. Basically there was no real quarrel between the factions on traditional values, but Wang assumed that you cannot leave people alone to improve themselves. For this, his enemies accused him of being a Legalist. Actually he was a pragmatic humanitarian, and although he believed in regulatory legislation, unlike the Legalists he wanted educated, well-trained, and responsible men to administer the laws. ". . . a man of real administrative gifts remains unemployed," he wrote, "and a man of really exceptional ability is boycotted by his conventional contemporaries."* He assumed that the moral virtues so widely preached should be used to strengthen the state and not merely individual bureaucrats. He was also a Confucian fundamentalist in his demand that the upper classes end their extravagance, that the production of luxury goods be curtailed, and that "every family should have enough for its needs and every man sufficient for his maintenance."

The "new laws" came to grief for practical as well as ideological reasons. Wang represented the practical thought for the burgeoning southern cities and wealthy middle class. By and large, his opponents represented the rural north and the estate-holders. Wang and his party were relative newcomers whose thirst for office and power could only be slaked at the expense of those who held them. They understood and respected trade, commerce, and money. His opponents disdained them. Wang had to effect his reforms against a bureaucracy long practiced in the arts of survival, and since there were few officials who would

* *Ibid.*

not suffer some loss of power, privilege, or perquisite under the "new laws," many disparate elements gathered together to fight them.

The recognized leader of the opposition was Ssu-ma Kuang, whose lifespan almost exactly coincided with Wang's. He was a great scholar and a notable statesman. He opposed Wang as early as 1068, but seeing that he had no hope of changing the course of reform, he resigned his post in 1070 and retired to write a famous history. In the last year of his life, he was recalled by the Dowager Empress Kao. In this year of office (1085–1086) he tried to erase every vestige of the reforms. Many other officials in opposition to Wang had been either transferred to the provinces or retired from public life and replaced with Wang supporters. When Wang died his opponents were recalled to office. In effect, two "parties" were created, each with a "platform," a phenomenon rare in Chinese history, where emperors came and went but the bureaucracy went on forever.

Wang used his power to humiliate and eliminate his enemies, arousing such bitterness that after his death not only were his associates driven out of office but his triumphant enemies chose to appoint men to office whose sole qualification was opposition to Wang. Thus revenge was permitted to overtake proper administration. The real weakness of the "new laws," however, was their dependence upon well-trained, honest, and dedicated officials. There were few of these. Although Wang raised the pay of the service in an attempt to end petty graft, he had little success, for the bureaucracy made more out of graft than out of pay raises. So the minor bureaucrats fought him as well.

Whether, as later supporters claimed, the failure of Wang An-shih hastened the downfall of the Sung dynasty by dissipating the real energies of China, we cannot know. What seems certain is that after him institutional reform was never a part of the apparatus of orthodox Confucianism, and the brains of China turned their energies to the problems of man's place in nature and the universe, assuming his society was perfect.

[27]

A Century of Speculation

The passion of the reform struggle of the eleventh century was matched in the twelfth by the intensity of the effort to derive a new Confucian syncretism that would permanently establish an intellectually acceptable, workable, and indubitably Chinese world view and ethic. In a sense, the reform period was simply part of a greater intellectual ferment, arising from the stabilization of politics and the consequent emergence of security for the administrative class. The equilibrium of a single system of governing over a long period of time had directed the talents of China into the arena of philosophy.

In both the Northern and Southern Sung period, China enjoyed probably the most remarkable group of civil-servant-scholars any nation has had. Their disputation over social institutions was only the penumbra of their disputation over the laws of nature and the universe. Their thinking concerning the correct interpretation and application of Chou and Han ideas covers a great many areas, which we subsume under the Western term Neo-Confucianism and which the Chinese call the School of Reason. It was an attempt to derive rational answers to questions of origins, processes, knowledge, ethics, and morality. It may be said to have begun with Han Yü, to have peaked with Chu Hsi

and, in a sense, never to have ended, for after Chu Hsi the system of thought held until the disasters of the late nineteenth century forced its abandonment. The answers were queried and opposed, but never successfully, for five hundred years, and Chu Hsi has been compared with Thomas Aquinas to the extent that both used reason to build a great and enduring system. Aside from this, the parallel does not hold, for unlike Aquinas, Chu Hsi was not an originator. Further, the Chinese did not draw upon the pluralisms that enriched the West, and Chu Hsi did not provide a logic that permitted his own system to be superseded.

There were limitations or boundaries in Chinese thought that no one crossed. Whereas the thirteenth-century West could refresh itself from Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Christian, or Oriental sources, the wellspring of all Chinese thought was Chinese, either Confucian or Taoist, or a Buddhism adapted to a Chinese environment. Aquinas had to rationalize the widely disparate Augustine and Aristotle, among other things. Chu Hsi's ultimate authority, like that of his friends and enemies, was the Classics.

Given limited alternatives, once you demonstrate the logical fallacy of one, you are left with the other. Studying Chinese philosophy is a good deal like reading sonnets. You do not complain if superficially most of the sonnets sound alike; you are fascinated by what each poet manages to do within the form. Western philosophy, by comparison, is more like reading free verse. But despite a monolithic form, Neo-Confucianism embodied many diverse concepts about many things. We shall look only at the development of the ideas concerning the ordering of the cosmos and the ordering of the society.

THE ARCHITECTS OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM

The staunch Han Yü passed on to his successors a profoundly nationalistic distaste for Indian thought, an appeal to the Confucian past, and scholarly attention and respect for the neglected work of Mencius. His era, and those following, raised practical questions concerning government and education, the answers to which had to be capable of meeting the subtle arguments of Taoism and especially Buddhism. As Waley wrote:

> . . . Buddhism had now so strong a hold over all classes of society that any system of belief that did not incorporate the fundamental ideas of Buddhist metaphysics had no chance of general acceptance in China, and one party of reformers was already attempting to make the synthesis between Confucianism and Buddhist philosophy which culminated later in what we know as neo-Confucianism.*

This could only be achieved by overcoming Buddhism with new arguments or by incorporating its ideas into the Confucian canon as demonstrably Confucian. In the Sung era scholars were enabled for the first time, through printed texts, to study the entire body of their traditional knowledge. Upon a general understanding of the critical limits of thought as embodied in the Classics, scholars began in the eleventh century to construct the proper answers.

Chou Tun-i (1017–1073) was the trail blazer of a purely Chinese system of thought, linking together the "Absolute" of Taoism and the "Enlightenment" of Buddhism with the natural and social morality of traditional Confucianism. He postulated an Absolute as the great principle of the universe and the primal source of all things, including the mind that conceives it. He disposed of the Buddhist (and Taoist) doctrine of the unreality of creation by calling this absolute source of real and experiential phenomena the non-Absolute as well as the Absolute, thereby incorporating the concept of non-being into the Confucian concept of being. His theory of an Absolute came from the ancient *Book of Changes,* and it has been considered singularly appropriate that a book of ordered schemata should provide the inspiration for the metaphysics of bureaucrats.

According to Chou Tun-i's principle, the truth of the universe is inseparable from the truth of the sage, since the highest material manifestation of the absolute is sagehood. The Absolute presupposes a life for rational ends. Since reason and morality are a unity, there is a single moral objective for the universe. We can discern Buddhism in the individual search for sagehood (En-

* A. Waley, *Life and Times of Po Chü-i* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 23.

lightenment), Taoism in the comprehension of a deterministic absolute principle, and Confucianism in the belief that both the search and the principle are real in a real world created for comprehensible moral objectives.

Chou Tun-i's vague principle of creation and process is conceived of by Chang Tsai (1021–1077) as a single material substance identical with but apart from the Absolute. This substance is itself the universe, and through reason it becomes all forms but also exists apart from form. Whereas Chou Tun-i compromised with the nothingness of Buddhism, Chang Tsai's universal material substance, constantly becoming the forms of the phenomenal universe and constantly returning to its Absolute self, demolished the dogma of phenomenal illusion inherent in Buddhist thought. According to Chang Tsai, the universe is real enough, whether or not it takes a form perceptible to the senses. The important thing is to try to understand the process of change, the reality of that which changes being axiomatic. However, he exempted the spirit and the mind from his material philosophy, explaining these by a metaphysical principle aside from and yet consonant with his matter or *ch'i*. He hypothesizes a duality of matter (*ch'i*) and essentiality (*li*) within a unity that follows easily from Chou Tun-i's idea "the Many are One": "the One are Many." And he indicates that it is in man that the *ch'i* and *li* meet. The *li* is naturally good but the *ch'i* can be bad. In other words, man has a dual nature, of which the material part is disposed toward evil. The physical nature of the senses is separate from the metaphysical nature of the mind and of morality.

> The mind of the ordinary man is limited to sense impressions. What the sages sought to attain was to exhaust nature, so they never tied their mind down to the senses only. They looked upon the world as if all things were a part of themselves.*

With Ch'eng I (1023–1108) the nature of these universal principles becomes quite sharply refined and also buttressed with the authority of Chinese antiquity. Principle becomes Ch'eng I's *li*, or reason, an overriding, immutable, and eternal principle of

* Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

the universe, which directs and forms the universal substance. Since the supreme directing force is reason, there is a rational base for all existence, thought, and action.

> All things in the world can be understood in the light of reason. Each entity works according to its principle or the order of nature. In each, therefore, there is reason.*

By the use of the principle of reason, man may through deep investigation come to understand all things and approach the comprehension of reason. He will thus inevitably come to know that there is an eternal reasonable order of things. In so doing, through the triumph of his *li* over his *ch'i*, he will have triumphed over the probable corruption inherent in his physical nature.

With Ch'eng I flowers the school of the duality of the universe and of human nature. Evil is now explained as arising from man's physical nature. Man's nature disposes toward evil when it is materialized—is born—for the *ch'i* may be deficient in one regard or another, but men can purify themselves by means of right study, behavior, and action to the victory of good. This is quite close to the primitive Buddhist concept explaining the existence of evil.

In these thinkers the Chinese intellectual world had at last come to fruition. They had moved most of the distance toward a secular philosophy of ethics and a metaphysic that later produced a supple, satisfying, intellectually exciting system, and subsuming all kinds of moral, epistemological, ethical, social, and political matters. With Ch'eng I's concept of *li* as that cosmic immaterial principle distinct from and superior to but not separate from the material, we can see the parallel with the Western principle that all material things have an immaterial governing principle, indestructible, eternal, and infinitely superior to the material. Ch'eng I's universe is rational. "What is ordained by Heaven is the Heavenly decree. What persists in things is reason. What makes a man is his nature. What acts as the determining factor for man is mind."†

* *Ibid.*, p. 211.
† *Ibid.*, p. 191.

In this philosophy it is not the work of the mind to think in terms of logical process, but to discriminate between right and wrong. The thinking man—the sage—is also the moral man. The cognitive and discriminating mind is the higher aspect of man and should be used for its ordained purpose.

It was necessary to support these postulates upon traditional thought. Therefore a neglected Confucian work, the *Book of Mencius,* came into its own as an object of study and eventually as a distinguished part of the canon of the Classics.

The *Mencius,* composed some two centuries after Confucius, has a coloring of Taoism and an organization and argument that appealed to Sung minds. It gives confirmation, through an unimpeachable Confucian source, of an Absolute; furthermore, it hints at the inseparable connection of the natural law of the universe with the moral order.

> "What do you mean by the Vital Spirit?" one of the disciples of Mencius once asked. "It is very difficult to describe," Mencius replied. "This spirit is tremendous and strong. If unobstructed and properly nourished, it will fill the whole universe. But it requires for its growth the steady pursuit of the sense of justice and truth. For without the sense of justice and truth, the spirit of man withers."*

THE BUILDER OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM

Chu Hsi (1129–1200) was not an originator but an interpreter and system-builder. Born of a family with a considerable reputation in learning, he became himself the greatest Sung scholar. In 1151 he was placed in charge of education in a part of Fukien province, where he proved himself a beneficent administrator and a reformer before he resigned in 1158. For twenty years thereafter he held a series of minor sinecures, and during that time became nationally known as a teacher, scholar, and writer. He did not again accept public responsibility until 1179, when his very eminence forced him out of semiretirement to become a prefectural administrator. He had been urged during these years to accept offices but declined, presumably because his personal ideas and ideals conflicted with government prac-

* Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tung-Po* (New York: John Day, 1947), p. 137.

tices. He was an advocate of strong morality in government, disdaining hangers-on and lickspittles in office. He was also profoundly nationalistic in advocating a strong foreign policy, holding it a moral duty of China to reconquer the northern plains. In this, he attacked the advocates of peace and a Little China as morally reprehensible men.

After he had taken office in 1179, he ran into trouble with his opponents on matters of ministerial corruption and inefficiency. He even memorialized the throne itself as being amenable to a clique of opportunists while good men were frustrated in their efforts at constructive criticism and action. He resigned his office in 1183, retook it in 1189 but again ran into the same kind of mismanagement that disgusted him. During this last term of office he drafted the most formidable kinds of memorials, which in their picture of official greed, crookedness, and complacency were an indictment, not only of the government but of the emperor himself; for, as a good Confucian, Chu Hsi held the ruler responsible for his choice of bad ministers. Naturally, the ministers struck back at Chu Hsi and his followers, condemning them as political heretics. He left office under attack in 1196.

His political career gives us some indication of the roots of his thought. He was a Confucian moralist and patriot of the sternest sort, an opponent of the "new laws," willing to back his convictions openly at the cost of his career, his reputation, even his life. As a scholar he had absorbed all the Buddhist and Taoist works; his intense secular concern made him unable to accept their promise that this world is an illusion. He then entered into the mainstream of the rational philosophy of his age. In the belief that he was getting at a true, viable Confucianism Chu Hsi developed familiar concepts and brought them together into a working system.

According to Chu Hsi, *li* is the universal determinant and pattern of every part of man's nature. It is the subsuming pattern of society and the individual, and the principle of first cause and of order. Chu Hsi next explains the relationship between the material and the immaterial by stating that they inhere in each other absolutely but not coterminously, that *li* exists prior to *ch'i*. How, then, bring man into this scheme of the material/immaterial ab-

solutes? By assuming that the order of living things proceeds according to the purity of their constituent matter and that at the highest level of man, relative good and evil depend upon the purity of matter. If it is evil, then the proper human use of *li* (which he calls here the *tao*) can clear away corruption. This is self-evident from the fundamental postulate that heaven, earth, and man are linked together by the same ultimate primal pattern, and that we possess an ordered universe, in that there is immutable arrangement of all its parts. There is no thing without an individual moral charter for its existence.

Although the controlling principle in Chu Hsi's system is metaphysical, the sum total of all of the system's apparent manifestations (individual things) make up a real universe. The universal does not exist apart from the particular. Since the universal is good, so the objective of all particular reality is goodness, and the objective, and indeed duty, of any man is to be good, in line with the ultimate principle that is his nature. To rise above the potential evil of his material context, man must extirpate desire. He does this by the conscious knowledge of the universal good —acquired not through mere meditation on it or the passive seeking for it but through an active investigation of such things as will enable him to perceive the ultimate good. In particular, one investigates relationships, the co-ordinating principles of all things. This is quite in line with the old Confucian teaching that stresses the study of the natural relationships between men, merely substituting the principles of those relationships. According to Chu Hsi, these principles concern such matters as fairness, benevolence, and good faith, and they are the controlling rules of conduct.

While enlightenment might come to any man, Chu Hsi goes on, it is hardly possible that it can be accomplished by those other than sages. Less fortunate men can perform their duty by remaining law-abiding, attempting to emulate their more fortunate betters. This concept can be summed up as an imperative moral law demanding, in an orderly, intelligible way, that every man accord with the principle of the universe, with the consequent laws of morality, and thus with the laws of the earthly state.

Although it is true that the Neo-Confucians postulate the mind as the key to existence (which could tempt one to draw analogies with the Cartesian first principle, "I think, therefore I am"), their approach was humane, scholarly, and bookish, excluding the scientific investigation of things. First principles for Chinese scholars were not a matter of inquiry into phenomena but of the study of the Five Classics and the Five Books (as seen through Chu Hsi's commentaries). To these were added eventually the *Chin-ssu-lu,* an anthology of the Sung philosophers, compiled by Chu Hsi.

Chu Hsi's explicit world system satisfied the common sense of the Chinese. The School of Reason opened its way to all through practical self-cultivation, aiming at the perfectability of man, and it was concerned, like most human beings, with the reality of this world. It made the attainment of virtue possible through the widest kind of moral inquiry. The catalyst for good government was the recognition of *li* (which disposed of the Han theory of anomalies and catastrophes). The importance of this system for government in China lay in its teaching that self-perfection of the individual was significant only when it led to the correct ordering of society. Purification of the self, in effect, inculcates loyalty.

Neo-Confucianism was too austere and introspective to be true to the very human thought of either Confucius or Mencius. In its ethical prerequisites for knowledge it borrowed from Buddhism. But in its belief that knowledge is to be learned, rather than intuited or derived from experience, it is purely Chinese. The undercurrent of insistence upon personal government is Confucian. In developing a theory of knowledge devoted to the perception of ultimates, it is akin to Buddhism. It is Chinese in rejecting contemplation for its own sake and demanding that intelligence must have a personal and social use. Above all, it is Confucian in stating that any man—not just special men or communities—can arrive at the proper insight.

Like all revolutions, however, Neo-Confucianism wound up by creating its own dogmatic authority, interpreted and systematized by Chu Hsi and his students and disciples. In his own century Chu Hsi's work was far from orthodox. There were wide

differences among scholars on questions of human nature, the mind, and life's purpose, and many schools of thought were as influential as Chu Hsi's. Also, Chu Hsi's authority was challenged by political opposition. But this brilliant, essentially Chinese system made sense, and in 1237 the commentaries and anthologies of Chu Hsi became official school texts. Later, in the fourteenth century, this body of knowledge was held to contain all that was valid and needful for the solution of human problems. The elasticity of Confucian thought was now at an end, for deviation from the line of the School of Reason meant failure in the examinations.

SUNG SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The first reference to a printed book comes near the end of the ninth century. By the eleventh century printing had advanced from a minor art to a great industry. There were two methods of printing a page. In the one an entire block of wood was carved with the characters for that page and printed as a unit until worn beyond use. In the other, clay characters were molded, kiln-fired, and fastened to a metal plate with glue. After the page impression was made, the glue was loosened by heat and the clay type recovered for further use.

Printing was perfected if not developed in Szechuan, which was the literary center of late T'ang, especially while the court resided in Ch'engtu (881–886). During the Five Dynasties, the Classics were printed at Ch'engtu to preserve them, and by 1030 printing was widespread on both government and private presses. The main publications were historical and classical, but there was also a great run of literature and grammars; herbals and books on zoology, medicine, botany, and alchemy; and much religious material, including the entire Buddhist canon in three thousand volumes, as well as the major Taoist works.

At the same time that the handful of clerical and lay scholars in the medieval West were, perforce, content with manuscript copies and rescensions of late Roman and Carolingian works, the Chinese student and civil servant had at their disposal in print their whole store of literature. (The state was the great printer through its academies and through the privy council and other

government bodies, which printed all kinds of works.) Yet while the development of printing in Europe, coming centuries later, brought about the most radical transformations in life, its impact in China was confined to the scholar-bureaucrat. Unlike Europe, China did not develop the techniques of mass book production. Social and economic conditions prevented large capital accumulations for presses; and the difficult classical language, plus restricted education, would have limited the number of readers. Furthermore, the Chinese did not rely on the printed word or have the Europeans' faith in the tangible deed or contract—a result of the deep influence of Roman law.

Sung science was superseded, in its time, only by Islamic medicine. Gunpowder, formerly a toy, became a weapon of war. The magnetic needle, formerly an instrument of magic, became a navigational device. The steel for the needle was a product of the great Sung coal and iron technology. It has been estimated that by the end of the eleventh century China was producing 150,000 tons of iron annually, equal to the entire production in Europe in 1700. This iron and steel was being used for instruments, buildings, machines, coins, and weapons. Coal was used for both heat and power (petroleum was known and used for flame warfare and ink carbon). After the thirteenth century the extent of iron metallurgy declined, partly due to the failure to develop large-scale industrial operation. From Sung factories and workshops came new devices, which by diffusion and transmission westward were to affect European life deeply. Among these were (in addition to printing, gunpowder, and the compass) the stern-post rudder, canal-lock gates, silk-weaving machinery, chain treadmills, the breast strap and collar for horses, piston bellows, deep drilling rigs, and many others.

During the same period geodetic surveys, using a fixed terrestrial unit of measurement, made observations from Indochina to the Great Wall, to determine some of the most remarkable maps ever made. First-rate gazeteers and topographies were common, including fine descriptions of foreign lands. The refinement of knowledge about the surface of the earth led to advances in meteorology and astronomy. Good descriptions of eclipses, seasonal measurements of precipitation, accurate tidal information,

and the first record of a supernova (Crab Nebulae–1054) were the result of sophisticated instruments–armillary spheres, mechanical clocks, rain and snow gauges, planispheres, tidal gauges –and the most advanced mathematics in the world. Sung algebra used the zero, simultaneous linear equations, progressions, series, complex volumes, a system for deriving binomial coefficients, very large and very small numbers, biquadratic equations, methods of finite differences, sophisticated place notation (already very old in China), and a matrix system of notation. (Later, in Yüan times, spherical trigonometry would be developed.)

Despite this, there was no significant union of mathematics and science, just as there was no union of technology and science. The overriding cosmological orthodoxy was to mitigate against any scientific "revolution" as we understand it, while the overriding ethic mitigated against any industrial "revolution." The divorce of the empiric from the conceptual is well seen in the least-developed Sung science, medicine. Chinese medicine had an enormous fund of knowledge about drugs; indeed it had the largest pharmacopoeia in the world, but it was far behind the brilliant Moslem medicine of the same time, and it continued to remain behind that of later medieval Europe. Training in the diagnosis and treatment of the ills of the human third of the heaven-nature-man trinity was bound by belief in the harmonious relationships of man with all the cosmos. Every part of the body was assumed to relate not only to every other part but also to the five elements and the "two principles," and one's health depended on the balance between the organs and openings of the body; the five humors (hot, warm, cold, wet, dry), and the seven sentiments (joy, anger, sadness, desire, hate, love, fear). Diagnosis was made through a complex differentiation of types of pulse beats. Treatment was homeopathic (the prescriptions often recalling the witches' brew in *Macbeth*), with sustaining help from religious exercises.

The static nature of Chinese medicine and the failure of Sung mathematics to develop a new theory of the cosmos were the result of the prevalent philosophy, which was based on an immutably fixed order of relations. Revolutionary concepts in science could have shattered this accepted harmony and there-

fore the temporal order as well. Science in the West could be neutral, but not in China. So long as it was only a heuristic device, so long as, like Ptolemy's system, it explained the apparent configurations of the universe, it served the ethic. But if it should attempt to define reality, it did not so serve. In the Christian West cosmologies could be devised, there being no one perfect system and no set harmony between man and nature. The deep sense of harmony and order in Chinese thought contrasts sharply with the Western Christian feeling that things cannot remain as they are, a feeling that led to the hope of linear progress.

In the Confucian cosmology, reality was not the thing or the substance, but the relationship. In the West one says a thing "is" or "is not"—one or the other, but not both. In Confucianism a thing may exist both because it "becomes" or "does not become," and the major concern is the study of the relationships of becoming and not-becoming. This proper understanding of relationship could not come through "laws" describing a new reality. "Laws" did not exist in the rationalist Confucian system, where causal law is not verifiable by the senses but rather exists *a priori* in the mind. Empiric science had no place in such a system. Sensory data were held unreliable, for they could not comprehend the essential character of things. Perhaps this is why no Chinese scholar ever put two lenses in a tube to make a telescope.

As noted earlier, the scholarly environment in China tended to be totally bookish, neither philosopher nor mathematician being in touch with the skills of the craftsman. Unlike Elizabethan England, the Confucian learned man did not write handbooks for mechanics or give lectures in scientific principles to apprentices. The divorce of learning from techniques was quite complete. The majority if not all of Chinese scholars opted for the Mencian status of the life of the mind, while Western medieval scholars and theologians worked with head and hands, one and same man turning out both cosmological speculations and treatises on viticulture or tanning. Chinese bureaucratic scholars showed no interest in getting results for which technical knowledge was needed. Their concern was with the morality of the individual man and not with a new heaven and a new earth.

Western power technology depended upon man's exploitation of nature. The Chinese seem simply not to have been power-conscious, since neither wind nor water nor gravity nor magnetism, all of which they knew, was applied to industrial processes. In the West work in itself had value, and this led to the rationalization of industry and production. In China work was honorable in relation to its status, and there was a denigration of material rewards.

The foregoing does not provide final answers but a speculative approach to the reasons why experimental science did not develop from the rich thought of China. In summary, one might say that there was no intellectual structure for it. Men have been manipulating nature since time began, but without a logical structure, a systematic approach, the result is technology and not science. Chinese thought in this instance remained at the technological level.

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Eurasian Interlude

THE MONGOL RULE OF CHINA

By 1279 all China, for the first time in its history, was under the absolute domination of conquerors, the Mongols, although for a generation prior North China had been Mongol. The Mongol rule lasted until a native Chinese dynasty was restored through civil war in 1352–1382. Taking 1215, the year Genghis Khan seized Peking, as the earliest date for Mongol suzerainty of any part of China, the domination of the house of Genghis over Chinese affairs lasted 153 years, with its apex during the reign of Kublai Khan (1250–1294). Those years are described by one Western historian as a dynasty of disaster ruling a despoiled and depopulated country, bolstered by aliens brought in from all Eurasia. An equally reputable Western historian considers this as the period of China's most effective administration. There is merit in both judgments.

Under the Mongols peace and order were restored, although the war and disorder that they repaired were rooted in their own long and grinding campaigns through China. An effective and tightly run administration was indeed established. On the other hand there were heavy tax burdens, a great many people were dispossessed to maintain the military organization, and the economy

was unbalanced through the establishment of the center of power far in the north at Peking and through the inflation of a paper currency. There was a vast tolerance of all religions and cults (Buddhism was especially protected), but the reason for it bothered the Chinese elite more than the physical presence and rule of an alien house. For the Mongols believed that men and ideas from anywhere in the world were just as good as the Chinese and their ideas. To the Mongols, China was the most important part of their great realm, but not the center of the world. They cared little for Chinese culture. They had come to conquer not to admire. To the culturally arrogant Chinese, the knowledge that their "barbarian" masters regarded them not as the pivot of heaven and earth but as just a part of it was a gross humiliation.

Between the Great Wall and the Siberian taiga and between the Manchurian plains and the Altai range lived a large number of pastoral and forest peoples, closely linked in language and in ethnic traits. They lived in clans and subclans, and occasionally some of them grouped into large tribal clusters under a single kingly leader or khan. The more important and powerful groups lived along the Kerulen and Orkhon rivers, and in the mid-twelfth century they began to coalesce as a nation of tribes or an *ulus* called Mongol, after the leading clan. In 1206 they assembled to proclaim the Mongol leader Temuchin as Genghis Khan. Temuchin was an extraordinary man who through courage, self-discipline, and high military and administrative ability, had within a short time taken control first of his own clan and then of this nation of Turkic-Tungusic clans forming north of the Great Wall. Little is known of the tribes or their situation at this time. Their own history and the great law code of Genghis have survived only in fragments. But it is wrong to regard them as the sort of half-civilized, ferocious Indians of North Asian great plains so popular in movies and stories. Far from primitive, they regarded themselves as the only truly free men, who, through the breeding of domesticated animals and the running of herds, were far superior to the poor peasant bound to soil and master. Commerce, cities, and agriculture were not strange to them. They had fortresses, citylike encampments, and they bought and sold. But their

power and their freedom lay in not being dominated by these factors, in accepting them only as modifiers of life.

Genghis had powerful enemies. The reduction of these began in 1205. In that year he moved to satisfy the Mongol feud with the Chin by crushing the Hsi-Hsia state. In 1210 the Hsi-Hsia campaign was over. In 1215 Peking was taken and sacked while the Chin moved the capital of their remnant state to Kaifeng, having yielded control of the Wall, a large part of North China, and their great horse herds to the Mongols. Sung forces were allied with the Mongols in the Hsi-Hsia war, but owing to a bitter dispute that arose, the Mongols came to look upon the Sung as an enemy.

There was now a long lull in the Chinese campaigns. Genghis moved westward to destroy his enemies in Central Asia and died in 1226 as the result of an internal injury suffered during the Tangut campaign. As was the custom, a *kuriltai*, or great assembly of the leading Mongol clans, met to elect a successor. Not until 1229 were the claims of the legitimate heirs settled in favor of Ogadai Khan, who, in that same year, smashed the last of Chin and turned his attention to the government and exploitation of North China from his capital at Karakorum.

For North China the preceding years of Mongol rule under first Genghis and then his son and deputy Tului had been rigorous. The seizure of Peking was followed by a wholesale dispossession of the population, as great areas of land (along with their people) were sequestered for grazing and as rewards to the Mongol commanders. To these measures were added a merciless exaction of tax tribute in the Shansi, Hopei, Jehol, and Chihli areas. Matters could have been even worse if Khitan officials serving the Mongols had not convinced their masters that long-range and profitable exploitation demanded a certain orderly amelioration of rule. The Khitan aristocrat Ye-lu Ch'u-ts'ai became secretary and adviser to Genghis and then chief secretary to Ogadai. To the wise and courageous intervention of this man is attributed the survival of North China during the early years of Mongol rule. In 1227, while on campaign, he was ordered back to Peking by Tului to end misgovernment, and when Ogadai became khan he ordered Ye-lu Ch'u-ts'ai to rationalize govern-

ment and taxes in North China. The result was a very strong government centered on the Peking area and essentially military in nature (the Mongols made no distinction between civil and military rule) with a graduated tax system. Next, having convinced the khan and his council of the lack of profit to be had from an arbitrary rule of peasants, he succeeded in decentralizing North China by dividing it into a series of fiefs, which were given to high officers.

When Kaifeng fell in 1233 a number of Chinese civil servants were brought into Mongol service, and in 1237 Ogadai re-established the competitive examination system for government service. This pacific Chinese civil counterweight to the Mongol-Eurasian military bureaucracy lasted only a year, for at Peking there was a powerful anti-Chinese faction whose sole interest lay in limitless exploitation of the conquests. This group was powerful enough to overrule Ye'lu Ch'u-ts'ai and set up tax-farming in 1239, when the taxes of all North China were sold to the Moslem Abd-arh Rahman. Until 1246, when Abd-arh Rahman was put to death by Kuyuk Khan, the Moslem tax farmers were in the ascendency, and not until 1251 was order again brought into the system.

KUBLAI KHAN

Ogadai died in the 1241, but his son and regent, Kuyuk, was not elected khan until 1246. Kuyuk was an able man who died young and was succeeded in 1251 by Mangu, who softened Mongol rule. In 1260 the most Chinese of the Mongol leaders, Kublai, declared himself khan. The capital of the Mongols was moved from Karakorum to Peking, and a true Chinese-style government established, for Kublai saw that China would have to be ruled its own way or destroyed. This is the beginning of a dynastic rule—the Yüan—as opposed to a military occupation. During the reigns of of Ogadai, Kuyuk, and Mangu a relentless campaign against the Sung had been carried on; under Kublai it came to an end in 1279. Kublai was the first of the line of Genghis to rule over all China, from the Great Wall to the jungles of Annam, indeed the first such ruler since the height of the T'ang era.

Unlike his predecessors, Kublai regarded China as the center of his domains. He removed the capital to Peking (from his sum-

mer camp at Ch'engtu, the haunting Xanadu of Coleridge's poem) and in 1271, with the re-establishment at his court of Chinese ceremonial and protocol, he founded a Chinese dynasty. Under him China was a great empire. The emperor maintained relations from Mongolia to Annam, Burma, Persia, and South Russia.

Domestically the administration was simple and of high quality. The Council of State controlled military and foreign policy, the Bureau of Internal Affairs controlled domestic policy, and the Control Bureau ran the civil service. Mongols held the chief offices of state; while there was an examination system, it operated only for Chinese competing for lesser posts. Ethnic discrimination was part of the system: at the top came the Mongols, then their foreign (non-Chinese) aides and allies, followed by the northern Chinese and, last, the southern Chinese. Only Mongols could go armed, a measure enforced by weapon searches. Even Chinese troops were armed only for battle; when they returned, their arms and horses were taken from them. Also, though the Chinese were allowed their own laws, Mongols were tried under Mongol law and judged and punished only by Mongols.

The weakest point of the Yüan rule was the fiscal system. During this dynasty dual taxation was in use. In North China head taxes and land taxes were levied according to which was larger in any year, the number of taxable adults or the number of acres under cultivation. In South China the old twice-a-year tax of the T'ang period was levied. The entire empire paid a high personal service tax. Atop the tax system was imposed a currency of paper, which until 1280 the Moslem financial ministers kept under control, but after that date inflation got out of hand, with a consequent depreciation of money, devaluations of hard currency, and disruption of the price structure. A good deal of the Yüan regime is marked by financial crisis due in some part to the great trust placed by the Mongols in their Moslem money men.

Before he died, Kublai attempted to end the chain of disastrous succession disputes by ruling that only his direct male descendants could become khans. The first of these was his grandson Timur (1294–1307). He followed his grandfather's policies, and it was during his reign that John of Monte Corvino established a Catholic church and seminary at Peking. At his

death, however, Timur left no sons, and he was followed by eight emperors in twenty-six years.

It is this brawling period of pretenders as much as the original period of plundering rule that led to the labeling of the Yüan rule as barbaric and decadent. Despite the rapid succession of rulers, however, the emperor of China was still the most powerful man in the world, because the descendants of Genghis who ruled the remainder of Eurasia in their own names acknowledged the khan as their liege lord.

Around the year 1300 the Yellow River abruptly and disastrously changed its course to empty into the Gulf of Chihli, flooding out the millions who lived along its lower course. Following the great floods came tens of years of agricultural disruption spotted with famines. The dynasty built dikes and dams, but by 1330 the constant repair costs had created a ruinous demand on the treasury.

The dissatisfaction of the North Chinese now was joined with the contempt of the South Chinese for the Mongols. In 1352 peasant revolts arose in Kwangtung and by 1360 had coalesced into a dynastic rebellion. China, from Canton to the Yangtze River, was beyond imperial control, yet at this critical time the Mongols began to fight among themselves. The tribes in Mongolia revolted against Toghan-timur, and while the main body of troops was fighting in Mongolia, it was relatively easy for the leader of the southern rebellion, Chu Yüan-chang, to consolidate his force in central China. He defeated Toghan-timur in the field in 1368, entered Peking, and proclaimed himself first ruler of a dynasty he chose to call Ming. By 1382, he had effective control of all China.

THE UNIVERSAL EMPIRE

Genghis conceived of his domain as a universal state to be extended beyond geographical frontiers, and his goal was peace and security wherein high and low, rich and poor, would serve under imperial rule. This was almost realized in 1241 when Mongol armies stood on the Baltic and the Adriatic, opening the route that was to enable Niccolo and Maffeo Polo to travel unmolested from the Crimea to Peking. Within thirty-five years of

its founding the Mongol confederation became in fact a universal empire.

The life of this empire remains the only time in history that a man could travel from a port on the Yellow Sea to a port on the Adriatic Sea and still be within the bounds of the same commonwealth, under the same protection. The instrument of this universality was a remarkable cavalry army, commanded by the Mongol elite, in which all tribesmen and later all able-bodied men were expected to serve. The troops were used to enduring day after day in the saddle. The Mongol horse, the hardiest in the world, was bred and raised on the open range and could travel one hundred miles in a day but then needed several days rest. The army traveled with its own great horse reserves. During extended marches the troops carried their own rations of dried meat and milk. The wooden saddles were designed for riding, fighting, or sleeping on the march. The main weapon was the short, relatively light, compound bow with a heavy pull and a long range, suitable for either a long-range arrow storm or short-range armor-piercing. To the great speed, durability, and extraordinary tactical mobility of the mounted force was added, through conquest, an engineering force of Chinese and Moslems, who comprised an expert and formidable siege train and a fine intelligence service. Over-all, there was an iron discipline.

While the tactics varied, the basic attack organization was a fan of widely separated striking groups, moving in line behind a far-flung heavy screen. On contact the screen would harass the flanks and front of the enemy, conducting if needed a false retreat to draw the enemy into the main body of the army. The screen would then divide into enveloping wings while the main force moved directly into the enemy to chop him into smaller and smaller groups, which could then be finished off. At other times the entire army participated in an enveloping maneuver for the same end—the attrition and destruction of the enemy. This field force, contrary to common belief, was relatively small and never outnumbered its enemy, yet conducted the greatest cavalry campaigns known. Led by excellent officers and well treated, it had a high morale. The only pay consisted of loot.

Particularly notable was the great campaign of 1221–1223,

when a cavalry column swept from Persia to the Dnieper River. This was followed by the great sweep of 1237–1242, when an army under Batu Khan moved into Europe, first destroying the states of Russia so that "no eye remained open to weep for the dead." After wintering in the Hungarian plain, the army crossed the Carpathians past Budapest, Breslau, Cracow, one wing coming to rest on the Adriatic near Venice and another moving along the Baltic, while the central force drove past Vienna to Neustadt. In four months Batu's general took Europe from the Vistula to the Baltic to the Danube and destroyed the armies of Kiev, Poland, Hungary, Saxony, Silesia, Brandenburg, and Bohemia. With the final conquest of Persia in 1256, when Baghdad, Damascus, and Aleppo were destroyed (the commander of this force, Kitabaga, was a Christian), Eurasia became fief to the house of Genghis.

The continuing inspiration for empire after the death of Genghis lay in the Yasa or house code of the Mongols, conceived and announced in 1206 by Genghis and added to during his life. With his death it became immutable. Under it the Great Khan was absolute. *All* men were his subjects according to a ladder of esteem on which the lowest were conquered settled peoples and the highest the Mongol clans who elected him. The unity achieved by a single leader died with Genghis, since his conquests were divided amongst his kinsmen, yet these inheritances were granted in such a way that man's lands were both his own and yet part of the empire. Each son or close kinsman received a substantial personal domain and also a part of the army wherewith to rule his appanage as a lieutenant of the Great Khan.

After the death of Genghis there coexisted two regimes in the empire—that subject to the Great Khan and that subject to individual rulers. It was difficult to tell them apart. Being an empire of conquest, it was ruled through military governors of military districts. The separate entities of the empire—China, South Russia, Persia, Turkestan, Mongolia, etc.—were run according to the tastes and dictates of the individual Mongol ruler but subject to the approval of the Great Khan. If there were any common elements of rule aside from a militarily enforced peace, they were firm administration, excellent communications, heavy

taxes, and a genuine concern for the social welfare of the ruled.

The clans under Genghis and his successors knew themselves to be instruments of Heaven in securing peace and order for all men. The Great Khan himself submitted to Heaven, for this was the source of his power. Mangu Khan stated in his letter to King Louis IX of France, "This is the command of the Eternal God. In the sky there is only one eternal God, on earth there is only one Lord Genghis Khan, Son of God . . . "* Genghis himself had always been conscious of an external supernatural power:

> The Sky has asked us to govern all peoples. With the protection and help of the Everlasting Sky I defeated the Keraits and attained to the supreme rank.†

The contentions of the Mongol khans, based on religious grounds and the testament of Genghis, that they were the sole rulers of the world were not empty. Mangu Khan and his brother Kublai pushed the Mongol frontiers to the borders of Egypt, and had it not been for the resistance of the Mamelukes, they would have taken North Africa.

When Kublai shifted the center of the empire to eastern Asia (Peking), he lost complete domination of the peripheral regions, a factor contributing to the disintegration of the empire of Genghis and his heirs. Other factors were the fundamental impossibility of running a universal empire on feudal principles; the paradox of a ruling class consisting of nomads living apart from the conquered; the enormous size of the conquests, which would have taxed a far more sophisticated system; and the bitter fratricidal disputes of the descendants of Genghis, each of whom wanted his own empire with a consequent fragmentation of lands and armies.

Marco Polo was the last traveler to know Asia as a unified domain. After his time the old dream of Genghis vanished. It was also the dream of men from Cyrus the Persian and Alexander the Macedonian to the Roman caesars and the popes. It even existed

* E. Vogelein, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers," *Byzantion*, 16 (1941), p. 389.

† B. I. Vladimirtsov, *The Life of Chingis-Khan*, D. S. Mirsky, trans. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 65.

in China, as a Confucian metaphysical concept. Genghis realized the dream, and his very power and ambitions gave Europe a new view of the world. Pope Innocent IV, in defense against this sprawling Asian empire in the making, advanced the idea of universal Roman spiritual domination and created the Franciscan missions to China. These were the first Westerners to cross into eastern Asia.

In particular, there was John of Pian de Carpini, sent to report on the organization of the Mongols. He was well-received, saw the election of Kuyuk Khan in 1246, and warned Europe of impending conquest. There were his aides, Benedict the Pole and Friars Anselm and Andreas; there was William of Rubruk (1252–1254), the first European to reach Karakorum (at least voluntarily, for he found there Russian and Hungarian interpreters, French goldsmiths, German aides-de-camp, all prisoners of war or captives serving the khan); and there was John of Monte Corvino, who went to China by sea in 1294 and became archbishop of Peking in 1307.

All the Franciscan travelers were decently treated, partly because of the Mongols' basic religious toleration, and partly because of their constant delight in novelties, but mostly because Rome and Karakorum had a common enemy, Islam. The Mongol campaigns against Islam had given the Church hope that they had found an ally against the infidel, as well as a mission field, and in 1248 the Mongols in Persia had even suggested to Louis IX of France a joint campaign against the Moslems. These projected alliances never came about.

In 1263 the Polo brothers were received by Kublai, and in 1275 they returned to China with their young nephew Marco, carrying letters from Pope Gregory X, to spend the next seventeen years in Kublai's service. Following the Polos came a number of Italian traders.

Less than a hundred years later, the new Ming dynasty dedicated itself to the extermination of every trace of Mongol rule and influence in China. The palaces and walls of Peking were torn apart and murderous manhunts undertaken. Yet this reaction was short-lived. Although many Mongols withdrew to their homeland, many remained in China, notably three-fourths of the Mongol

military forces. Mongols remained as officers and troops in the Ming service. Some Mongols became civil servants. Indeed Mongols were probably the largest non-Chinese element in China after 1368.

Nevertheless, the world-wide horizons of the Mongols had receded. These horizons had suggested themes that many Confucians instinctively rejected, for while few of them wished to avoid their foreign masters entirely, the many refused to lift their eyes beyond China.

❁ *RETROSPECT*

"Maturation" is used here in its dictionary meaning of "coming to a full development" and in its purer Latin sense of "complete as to period." In this age, running from the end of Rome to the Renaissance, the Chinese developed a body of concepts and techniques that provided a sound base for future Chinese governments and societies, just as they in turn had built upon certain positive and enduring foundations laid down by past ages. The difficulties of summing up the age with any certainty is that our knowledge of it, despite the wealth of source materials, is fragmentary. Chinese historians wrote only of important matters like emperors, wars, the ruling class, and the life of the mind. Unknown is the world of the farmer, the trader, the merchant, the traveler, the obscure town and city dweller, indeed the whole peasant civilization—the material, in short, of which modern social and intellectual history is made. It was recorded in China only on the rare occasions when the Chinese masses rebelled and disrupted the world of the literate. Therefore, even the best writing represents only a single shard from a whole great world.

The change from the T'ang to the Sung dynasty was far more than merely another change in government. The years of weakness after the rebellion of An Lu-shan had brought about a fundamental shift in the quality of social life and the structure of the social order on which political forms rested. This change is so significant that the Japanese sinologist Naitō Torajirō argues that

the Sung dynasty is the beginning of the modern period in China. What he means is that China had reached the stage of political and social development that characterized the modern period in Europe. Marking this stage were the end of the aristocracy as competition to the central power of the monarchy, the emergence of new classes without aristocratic standing, the development of absolutist power, and the rise of a culture created by commoners of talent as well as aristocrats.

Respect for aristocratic pedigree had conspicuously deteriorated in the final years of T'ang. Men of ability from the ranks of commoners rose to power as military commanders over large areas. A system of protégés developed, where military commanders passed on their authority, in defiance of the central government, to their adopted sons, sometimes chosen by the troops themselves. During the earlier dynasties, the aristocracy had held power collectively, and the emperor was merely the head of the aristocracy. It could (and repeatedly did) enthrone, depose, or murder an emperor. This came to an end in the Sung period, and no dynasty thereafter was ended by usurpation, only by outright conquest or civil rebellion. Thus the emperor became elevated, with no aristocracy to contain or balance his power.

In T'ang times the aristocrats had the right to challenge edicts drawn up by the Imperial Secretariat, but in Sung times and certainly in later dynasties, this right was shifted to the bureaucracy, composed of commoners from the gentry, who had only limited rights to challenge. With the growth in the position of the emperor and the decline of the aristocracy, an absolutism developed in which officials could no longer make decisions without ultimate reference to the emperor himself. Even the more powerful officials were unable to rule in the place of the emperor, and could maintain their power only with his support.

The dual tax system, introduced in late T'ang times, fundamentally changed the position of the peasants, who in earlier times were constantly victimized by the wealthy landholders and frequently reduced to the position of tenants and slaves. The new tax system provided for the taxation of the peasants wherever they were and no longer linked them to the land, thus improving their position. The civil service examinations had opened up of-

ficial positions to commoners, but the government still protected the status of the aristocracy through hereditary privileges. But with the Sung, especially with Wang An-shih's reforms of the examination system, practical matters were included in the curriculum. Further, a number of technological changes made possible a much wider spread of learning and culture. Printing had been invented during the T'ang period and flourished in late T'ang times and the Five Dynasties period. Through relatively cheap books this made possible the mass circulation of ideas and information. It also made official positions more easily obtainable for anyone willing to read, and prepared the way for a common culture, expressed in novels, dramas, essays, and new styles of poetry. The economy changed, as copper coinage replaced silk and thread, then was replaced in Southern Sung by silver and in Yüan and later times by paper money.

The same mode of life was common to all literate classes. A sense of historical dimension and a notion of the complexity of life find reflection in the literature of the period. In short, in its mode of life, its political and social forms, and its values, the China of Sung resembled the modern age more than the distinctly medieval culture of T'ang. The revolution in Sung, according to Naitō, was so profound that no element of life was left untouched, and a major period of Chinese development begins, a period brought to full development in Ming and Ch'ing times.

T'ang is the watershed of the old Chinese hereditary aristocracy, owing largely to the rise of the competitive examination system. During the reign of Empress Wu an increasing number of non-aristocrats rose to high position, and during the time of An Lu-shan and the later Five Dynasties, many aristocratic families were ruined or destroyed. While no uniform pattern of social leadership is visible, it seems true of T'ang that the civil services became dominated by men from the south, drawing their inspiration from the old literary and imperial traditions of refugees who fled there during the Age of Disunion. The military services seem to be dominated by men from the north, less amenable by custom and descent to southern traditions, and these were the men who came to power toward the end of the dynasty.

Sung was powerful enough internally to suppress military

domination and replace it with civil authority. This plus the lack of political restraints by hereditary aristocratic families increased the power of the emperor and the officials around him. So during T'ang and Sung society slowly changed from an aristocratic to an imperial and bureaucratic domination. The state needed the civil service in order to govern, and the bureaucracy needed the state for careers.

There is a tendency among historians to view Chinese society as being dominated by a very conservative ideology laid down by its rulers for their own self-perpetuation. Self-interest certainly played a part when power was the prerogative of a group whose major claim to it was their ability to read. But ideologies do not spring overnight from the minds of bureaucrats. A peasantry living on the edge of subsistence is naturally conservative and suspicious of innovation; innovation may bring crop failure and death to the village. The old ways at least maintained life and sometimes provided a surplus. Therefore the conservatism of the elite Confucian groups may be seen as a reflection in part of the thought of the peasant. Thus the pervasive static quality of the ideology, far from dominating conditions, was itself responsive to the inertia of subsistence agriculture.

During this age Chinese society was a battleground between two great principles, the principle of selection by family and that of selection by merit. Full victory went to neither one. Among the greater number of people, those on the land, status was accorded not by merit but by birth. Men followed in the occupational footsteps of their forefathers, and farmers did not ask what a boy was going to be when he grew up. At the upper level of society the concept of merit tended to dominate, but not entirely. For one thing, as has been pointed out, the real social competition in China was played out in the educational field, and therefore social mobility was very slow because an elderly man could be judged by the examinations he had taken as a youth. For another, those at the top could extend their merit through the favors of relatives. They worked for their family just as the farmer did. The examination system broke up the old aristocratic domination, but it did not eliminate nepotism.

The doctrine of governing men during this period combined

Mencian attitudes toward human nature with Legalism. Because it was also an educational doctrine, it was of capital importance, for there was a close connection between what men learned young and the political precepts they acted on when holding office. The beginning of the age established the framework of efficient administration with provincial governments, ministries, and national economic planning. By the Sung era the educated man had become not merely an amateur of government but a professional administrator. The creation of a censorship kept the civil service in a state of salutary apprehension. Government was not loved, but it was respected in proportion to its efficiency. The governing groups did not have things all their own way. Opposition to government, while not organized, existed as a natural thing. Although life made the farmer suspicious and secretive, it had not subjugated him. He knew what he was entitled to by custom and usage and also the limitations imposed by the same factors on his governors. The average Chinese reaction to officialdom was to cajole or argue, and there was a great expertness in assessing the pliability of officials.

State-controlled economy predominated. A money economy was revived and broadened, and the use of credit became widespread. Trade and commerce grew greatly but never threatened landed capital, which was always protected. The major economic problem at the beginning of the period was how to close the gap between food and population in North China. This led to an epoch of canal building to help transport grain. The same problem and same solution was evident at the end of the period. There is a notable growth of wealth of all kinds during these centuries. China's economy began to assume really large national proportions.

During late T'ang a new class of landowners arose, and during Sung they came to have considerable power. They were, by and large, the families of civil officials. At the same time the ancient system of land rotation disappeared, and the pattern on the land became a mixed one—estates, small farms, government lands worked by tenants. Despite new crops, new lands, and new methods, there was always in the background an agricultural crisis. Capitalism existed, in the sense of large resources yielding

riches to the owner. It did not exist as an economic system dependent on the free wage-earner and setting its stamp on every aspect of society—nor, indeed, did it exist in that form anywhere in the world until recent times. There was no organized money and credit market. There were no material pressures for large-scale production. After all, the main source of advantage was already enjoyed by the rulers—the spoils of office.

The empire was a perpetual due bill on China. The costs of maintaining the frontiers, providing for an expanding population, and holding the Central Asian trade kept the Chinese almost constantly embroiled with the Turko-Tatar peoples of Central and North Asia, and with the aborigines and civilized states of South China and Southeast Asia, and thus bankrupt. In the eighth century Central Asia was lost forever to the Turks. In the ninth century North China began to fall under the rule of non-Chinese, who slowly increased their domination until they had all of China. Joined with the problem of imperial defense were the recurrent internal military problems—the horrid cost of maintaining huge armies and reserves, the military domination of the late T'ang state, the conscious fundamental military weakness of Sung.

Unchanged by time was the singular emphasis on personal, as distinct from social, morality as the great determinant of history. This led to the ignoring by all but a few of the possibility that history was determined by the sum of many impersonal factors such as weather and geography. Whereas the Classical Mediterranean outlook was founded on a diversity of sources, whose constant exegesis pioneered significant intellectual changes, the Chinese outlook was derived from a single set of ancient sources. This provided enormous stability despite war and invasions.

There are no discernible "cycles" in this period, but rather a slow, ceaseless change that reproduced the past while transforming it.

PART V

THE MATURATION OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION 1368–1800

[29]

The End of the Beginning

The general historical judgment on some three centuries of the Ming rule (1368–1644), founded by the soldier-monk Chu Yüan-chang, has been an ambiguous one. On the one hand, it is considered the most powerful and prosperous state of its age, and it produced some remarkable scholarship. It exalted unity and stability, both of which it achieved and transmitted, and was vigorous in the defense of Chinese cultural tradition. Yet despite these achievements it seems inferior to other lengthy Chinese rules. Ming lived much on appropriations from the past and finally overdrew its account. Its greatest period extended to the middle of the fifteenth century, and by any reasonable standards the only significant emperors were the first and the third. Yet so great was the effect of the restoration of this native dynasty and the first century of reconstruction that a long line of unremarkable men were able to reign. At last an accumulation of domestic abuses and slack government, coupled with great enemy pressures from the northeast, brought the line to an end.

HUNG-WU'S DESPOTISM

Chu Yüan-chang, who became Emperor Hung-wu, was a man whose ferocity, courage, and discipline had triumphed over his

personal defects (he was illiterate and so ugly as to be likened to a pig). The final accession was not easy. The Mongols were the least of his enemies, and in opposing them he had all China with him. His most difficult time came in subduing his many powerful rivals with equal claims to authority. This took him some years and meant the reduction of great cities such as Soochow and the exile of thousands of his domestic opponents. That such a man should become implacable to his enemies and eternally suspicious of his friends is not surprising. He was a cruel and wrathful ruler, whose reign of thirty-one years (1368–1398) produced such a concentration of imperial power that his descendants lived for generations on what he had created. His methods were simple. His chief weapon was sudden and drastic intimidation of the bureaucracy, and with the exception of the first five or six years, his rule was one of personal despotism.

Unlike the founders of the Han and the Sung dynasties, both of whom were generous to those who had helped them to power, Hung-wu assassinated many of his benefactors. He set the character of central power from his day to the end of the traditional state in 1905. The emperor was absolute. The throne set, directed, and in a sense administered all national policy. This absolutism, served by a closely supervised bureaucracy, is what the Europeans of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries knew of China. They themselves, coming from emergent or full-fledged national absolutisms, admired what they believed to be a sterling example of wise and paternal government, which provided, through the medium of learned civil service, that each man got his due. They confused image with reality.

Yet for all his anger and suspicion, Hung-wu wanted a peaceful, prosperous, and united land. He was deeply concerned with restoring a measure of impartial justice and order to the countryside. To do this, he curtailed the power of his local magistrates to the point of rendering them almost helpless. He divorced himself from his own rebellious past and called on learned men and on the traditional institutions. Though he distrusted the men whose help he had summoned, he was determined to bear the Mandate of Heaven in a great personal style. Before his time the model of

government had been a pyramid with a powerful chief minister at the apex. Hung-wu placed the emperor at the apex, dominating the premiership which since 246 B.C. had been a check on despotism. To assist him he created in 1382 a Grand Secretariat, a coordinating body of five or six high officials with no final power of decision. Nor did the departmental ministers have complete jurisdiction over the work of their agencies. The emperor could and did appoint, at his pleasure and for varying periods of time, imperial commissioners who were his own representatives. For example, the old central military administration was abolished in 1380 and a frontier defense and Imperial Guards system—inherited, oddly enough, from the Mongols—were created. Military regions were also established, each of which had its own regional board to control the independent garrisons in its area. These boards were responsible to one of five specific military boards in the capital, which in turn were responsible to the emperor. Even the anciently independent Censorate was monitored by a specific Board of Security at the capital. By the beginning of the fifteenth century the powers of government in China had been deliberately diffused among a large number of civil and military boards and commissions, all dependent upon, directed by, and responsible to the emperor through his "grand secretaries." This overwhelming centrality never again diminished. It just became more or less efficient.

To reach his ends, Hung-wu re-created the old T'ang model as he understood it—re-establishing the examination system, respecting the Confucian cult and concepts, and bending his efforts to assist agriculture. The even efficiency of his reign helped to balance his bitter opposition to any real or imagined factionalism. By the time of his death he had brought an effective peace to China. He had established a united state divided into fifteen provinces, with its capital at Nanking in the center of China's wealth and population. He had brought the extreme south (Yunnan and Kweichow) and the extreme north (southern Manchuria) into the empire and had regained a Chinese hold in Central Asia at Hami. To the best of his belief he had re-created a traditional Chinese government modified according to his taste. The essential wisdom of his belief is best seen in the fact that

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after 1424 China suffered a succession of inept rulers and underwent a long decline into political delay, isolation, and inbreeding, yet managed to retain an enduring tradition to pass on to the Ming heirs.

HUNG-WU'S SUCCESSORS

Hung-wu had twenty-five sons, to each of whom he had given the title of prince with a domain to administer and an accompanying military force, in a move to protect the more vulnerable areas of China. His eldest son and heir had died before Hung-wu, and the nominal heir, his grandson, took the throne in the face of a number of independent and powerful uncles, each of whom, as a son of Hung-wu, felt that he had a better claim to the throne. Five years later one of his uncles usurped the throne with the connivance of the court, and became the Emperor Yung-lo (1403–1424).

Yung-lo was an able soldier with dreams of building a great empire. He moved the capital from the city of Nanking to the northern military center, Peking. All later historians have cited this as a fatal step, for it exposed the capital to raids from the north and accentuated the economic and cultural strains between North and South China. He seized Annam in 1407 (but China could only hold it until 1428) and set off a series of great naval expeditions to and beyond the Indian Ocean. Both he and his son died in 1425, and he was succeeded by his grandson, who died in 1436. In 1437 an eight-year-old boy took the throne.

In 1449 the young emperor Ying-tsung (1436–1449; 1457–1464) ill-advisedly led an expedition against the Mongols. His army was destroyed, and he was taken prisoner of war. No one seemed to care about the imperial prisoner, save for his considerate Mongol captors, and a clique at court placed his brother in power. The Mongols, unable to raise any ransom for their prisoner, sent him back, but still it took a military coup, which took place in 1457, to put the legitimate ruler back on the throne.

Until the sixteenth century China was run from the office of the palace secret police, dominated by eunuchs. While there were often good and able ministers, they were powerless against the activities of the enormous eunuch staff of the imperial household,

a number estimated at about ten thousand at the end of the reign (certainly more than twice the number of civil officials in the empire). Hung-wu had sternly opposed the creation of a corps of eunuchs within the palace, but within a generation after his death they were flourishing again—thanks to the size of the palace complex and the large numbers of royal women, for whom eunuchs were the traditional servants. So powerful did they become that they formed an inner court as against the outer court of high civil officials. Their influence was profound, since emperors were brought up and educated in the inner court and came to rely upon their eunuch officials and servants.

The sixteenth century was one of governmental decline despite great cultural achievements. Many scholars and officials, under the guise of an academic group, organized against the palace clique. They were crushed. In the seventeenth century local insurgency became epidemic. In 1631 there were thirty-six bandit forces on the loose. In 1640 drought set off a rebellion. In 1644 the rebels took Peking and the last Ming emperor committed suicide.

Almost any combination of administrative, fiscal, or military reforms might have bolstered the dynasty in those years, but no such steps were taken. Looking to a fixed past from the moving present, the dynasty gained what it believed to be stability but was, in reality, compulsive protection of the special interests of the court and palace.

THE LAND AND THE TAXES

During the first decades of its life the Ming dynasty was burdened by the costs of the continuing war against the Mongols, together with the normal costs of government, now accentuated by reconstruction and the grandiose style of Hung-wu. The first Ming emperor's ideas of magnificence seemed to derive from his conception of the sumptuous life of past emperors. He dispensed great sums of money and amounts of land to friends and family, treating China somewhat like a patrimony. To this the next emperor, Yung-lo, a lover of luxury, added the enormous costs of expanding and supporting Peking.

The location of the capital far in the north made the power of China dependent on grain shipments from the south. Its life-

line was the Grand Canal connecting Peking with the Yangtze valley. Between 1411 and 1415 Kublai's Grand Canal was put in working order as part of an enormous waterway and flood-control project. The canal was always a hazardous and expensive route. Running from Hangchow to Tung-chou just east of Peking, it followed the contours of the land, silted easily, and could be flooded by risings of the Yellow River, which it crossed. It was a difficult and costly job to keep it dredged, to keep its locks and dikes in repair, and to maintain and regulate the boats, boatmen, guards, depots, supervisors, inspectors, labor gangs, and granaries. But it was the most important piece of engineering in China. It kept the capital alive and enabled the Chinese, in the mid-fifteenth century, to abandon the coastal shipping routes made dangerous by natural hazards and piracy. It remained North China's umbilical cord until the nineteenth century.

The grain that traveled northward on the canal came from a vigorous agriculture. Hung-wu had removed the burden of oppressive land ownership and stopped Mongol extortions and reshuffled the tax and labor duties so that they might fall more equitably. In so doing he had calculatedly struck a blow at the great landed interests. The innovation of his reign was the introduction of a complex classification of land ownership, which listed the taxable units (families) and classified their real property on the criteria of the quality of their land and the degree of ownership (outright, mortgage, tenancy). This was an honest effort to get men to pay their just due to the government, and it postulated equality of payment. But because of the system's complexity, the tax quotas assigned slowly came to have little real relationship to the actual production of a given unit of land. Furthermore, a good deal of land was exempted from taxes, both legally and illegally, part of the latter being sheer graft and part the effort of local officials to protect farmers from the injustices of an impersonal system.

The reassessment of Hung-wu represents the last great effort in China to hold a cadastral survey for purposes of land equalization. The fact is that never in China's history was there a thorough and intelligent land survey and evaluation, and the tax quotas of

government were, by and large, based on unreal estimates of taxable land. The best that can be said for Hung-wu's survey was that for a time it did indeed help the poor and the landless. But the new classification was subject to abuses. Surtaxes in grain were often demanded by local tax officials to protect themselves against theft and spoilage of the stored grain, for which they were responsible; tax obligations on the land were retained by the seller in return for a substantial price for his property; obligatory labor services imposed on a village remained the same despite fluctuations in village population. The worst abuse was the old and honorable practice of tax evasion. Official corruption was sternly punished, but the root cause of evasion and extortion—inadequate official pay—remained. Not long after the death of Yung-lo, the entire Chinese administrative system renewed its ancient rivalry with the central government for a share of the national income.

Since the rich and powerful could evade land taxes, and local landlords and officials could impose labor service on the poor, there was considerable desertion and depopulation of good lands after 1500. After 1530 a spendthrift court and the burden of wars in Manchuria and Korea brought about a sharp rise in land taxes. It became obvious that governmental bankruptcy could be avoided only by a sensible reform that would not only spread the tax demands but simplify its collection. The solution was the "single whip" system, introduced gradually during the sixteenth century and by 1580 in use throughout China. All taxes were consolidated into a single tax, which could be paid in silver.

The "single whip" could not require silver payment in view of the shortage of hard money. It simply lumped all taxes into an annual due to be paid in a fixed number of installments. The dual collection of personal labor and of commodity taxes was abolished. Both the payers and the collectors found it easier to live with a fixed compound tax payable in money. Simplification of collection, even though the system varied from province to province, plus the avowed aim of equity, created a revenue system that anticipated Adam Smith and mercantilism by several centuries. No system, however, no matter how sensibly administered, could survive exaction and theft on a grand scale, or the inordi-

nate demands of the court, or the extraordinary expenses of government. By the end of the dynasty, the military expenditures alone were ten times the total expenses of the first reign of the dynasty.

Yet the natural economy thrived. Agriculture received great impetus through the introduction of new crops, particularly the development in the sixteenth century of late-planting, early-ripening rice, which led to an enormous increase in rice production. In the same century hillside lands were opened up for growing peanuts, sweet potatoes, and Indian corn (maize). The sweet potato, which came from Manila, was hardy, tasty, and nutritious and became a staple food of the poor. The peanut, brought in by the Portuguese, grew on sandy waste soil and became the leading source of oils and fats. It has been calculated that the introduction of these new foods utilized millions of formerly unproductive acres and afforded both the Ming and Manchu dynasties a great safety valve against population pressure on the land. These crops, along with cotton (cotton had come in during the Sung era but not until the Ming era did it become a large-scale cash crop), contributed to a rich and varied national economy in which cotton-weaving, vegetable oils, sugar-manufacture, and dyestuffs were significant factors in the creation of wealth.

Many officials enjoyed the fruits of trade, either through their families or, more directly, through official commissions in the salt or the maritime offices. The possibilities for wealth opened by the expanding natural economy, the new industries, and the pervasive opportunities for corruption motivated a vastly ambitious group to gain membership in the scholar and official classes. Entire families worked to give that single member an education, degrees, and an examination, so he in turn could help the family. The avenue to status now, more than ever, lay in the state service.

THE STATE SERVICES

The greatest administrative accomplishment of the Ming period was the re-establishment, on a permanent basis, of the civil service examinations. This was reinforced by an edict in 1369 providing for a government-supported school in every district and prefecture. It was stipulated that candidates must pass each stage

of the various examinations before going on to the next, beginning with the provincial examinations (held two out of three years) and progressing to the triennial provincial exam and then the triennial metropolitan exams at Peking. Ultimate success meant a palace test set by the emperor himself. The district schools did not limit entrance, and a surprising number of men became holders of the first or lowest degree. Few of these rose any higher, which became a vexatious matter to the government, for it meant an annual surplus of unemployed, half-educated men whose idleness and uselessness, while compatible with their talents, were inconsistent with their self-regard. They were a potential source of disaffection.

After 1369 a series of seven essays were set for the exams, which covered, in subject matter, the Four Books and the Five Classics. In Sung times such set essays had been standard, and as early as 1313 the subject matter had been restricted to Confucian works. But after 1487 the Ming exams specified in detail the very form of the essays, even as to the length of paragraphs and sentences. These increasing restrictions resulted in the "eight-legged essay," an incredibly confined form of writing, which dominated not only the examinations but a good deal of Chinese intellectual endeavor. No one knows really how or why the civil service examination essays regressed from the free and open questions of Sung to the crabbed rhetoric of the fifteenth to twentieth centuries.

Once past the preparation for examinations and the degree, the candidate faced further hazards to securing a post. The increasing imbalance of population between North China and South China and the domination of the civil service by an interlocking directorate of southerners (who preferred to ascribe their monopoly to a higher level of education and culture) led to a sliding scale of provincial quotas, whereby one-third of the candidates for office had to be from the north. This was hard on the more heavily populated south, but the evenhandedness of the system was remarkable.

From time to time there was scandal. An increasing number of men from poor families studied for the examinations and in doing so incurred a mound of debt. When they were in office,

since neither they nor their families could pay and since their stipends were very low, they cheated and squeezed to raise money. In the main, however, and aside from its intellectual tyranny, this system of examination and recruitment was for some four centuries probably the most honest and objective large-scale operation of its kind ever conducted, and when offenses did come to light they were punished.

The sins of Ming administration stemmed from the policy-makers who set the administrative tone and goals. The abuse of public affairs by the cabal of eunuchs and favorites, operating through a pliant and isolated emperor, became so great that by the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth many qualified men refused to enter into office, and a good many others refused to continue. By this time there was no hindrance to the exercise of arbitrary power by an emperor or his delegate, whether the power took the form of a written reprimand to a minor official or the public flogging of a high official.

Such checks on imperial power as may have lain within the service itself were rendered impotent by the same kind of factionalism that had ruined Wang An-shih centuries before. Partisans sought to achieve their own ends by forming bonds with the emperor, which alone guaranteed success. Even the impartial instrument of judgment, the Censorate, became ridden with jealousies. Often it directed its energies more to the punishment of its intramural enemies than to remonstrance with the visible defects of government.

In contrast to the role played by learning and examination in filling the eighteen ranks of the civil service, the military services were largely officered by hereditary selection. The command of units below what we would call the regimental level were passed on from father to son, and the high commands were selected from the same restricted group. This seems a strange way of conducting so vital a state service, but it is no stranger than the practice, beginning in the fourteenth century, of making the role of the common soldier hereditary also; for families were obligated in perpetuity to replace its members who had completed service. Throughout the fifteenth century government attempted to solve its military defense problems cheaply. From

Kansu to the Gulf of Chihli and along the pirate-harassed seacoast, a chain of autonomous military districts was set up, garrisoned by hundreds of thousands of hereditary replacements. The costs of these garrisons were met either by having them grow their own food or by permitting the merchants who supplied them to use the tenant-farmers as workers in lieu of payments. On the important and fluid northeast frontier, money was saved by the practice of awarding a permit to engage in the lucrative salt business if one reciprocated by the free transport of grain to the garrisons. This led the salt factors to the cheaper alternative of subsidizing frontier agricultural colonies. By 1492 the whole system had resulted in an enormous rate of desertion, and it was gradually abandoned. But it was too late to revive the armies. After Yung-lo the Ming armies were inadequate for any problem more serious than an internal revolt or a border incident.

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The Manchu Conquest

In the northeast frontier regions, at the end of the sixteenth century, one of the Ju-chen tribal chiefs, Nurhaci, who had been an ally of the Ming state, set himself to learn as much as he could of China and the Chinese. This was made easy by the Chinese system of frontier commands, which were so administratively self-sufficient and so closely tied to the allied tribes that they provided a training ground in Chinese administration and culture for any outsider who was keen enough. Nurhaci was this, and during his lifetime, through observation, emulation, and assimilation of Chinese ideology and organization, he and his people came to feel that they were, if not Chinese, very closely identified with the system and capable of managing China.

When Nurhaci attempted to use his growing tribal power against his old enemies, the western Mongols (who were also allies of China), he was blocked by Ming officials. He thus came to dislike the Ming, and assuming the ancient title khan, he took from the Chinese the posts of Fushun, Liaoyang, and Mukden and indeed, between 1618 and 1621, the entire Liaotung area. In 1625 he moved the capital of his "dynasty" to Mukden, and under his successor, Abahai, this city became the center of a Manchu-Chinese state of sorts. Abahai, who in 1636 called his reign "Ta

Ch'ing," had at his disposal a powerful and professionally commanded Manchu-Mongol-Chinese force. He governed reasonably well a large Chinese population, which preferred to live under Manchu rule rather than the decaying Ming. The growth of an organized state in Manchuria was, in conjunction with the outbreak of rebellion in China, too much for the dynasty.

For a generation prior to this period, rebel bands in China had been pacified by being permitted to "surrender"—that is, by being bought off. Far from stopping rebellion, however, this practice merely encouraged men to launch themselves on profitable careers of banditry, and this at a time of gross corruption, natural calamity, and weak government. One rebellion is of particular military and cultural interest. As early as 1629 the court had been persuaded to hire Portuguese mercenaries and gun founders from Macao. They made arms and trained Chinese troops to use them for the defense of the Liaotung area. When one Kung Yu-te rebelled in 1631, he captured a large number of cannon, muskets, and ammunition, and retreating north from Shantung, went to Abahai with his weapons. The Manchus later used these Western arms successfully against Ming armies.

During the 1630's rebel bands looted over a wider and wider area and even took small towns. The government, with its major forces on the northeast lines watching the Manchus, was too broken and dispirited to handle this wave of insurgency. By 1642 so many officers and men had deserted to the Manchu forces that the army was prepared to conclude a peace in the north. It was too late. Chinese rebels seized Peking. The one remaining strong and disciplined Ming force held the vital pass at Shanhaikwan, where the Great Wall meets the sea. The general commanding this force, Wu San-kuei, asked the Manchu allies for help against the Chinese rebels. An agreement was reached with the Manchu regent, Dorgon, and thus a Chinese unlocked the gates to his country for an alien invader. Wu San-kuei and the Manchus retook Peking. Invited to leave now that the purpose had been achieved, the Manchus chose to stay—until 1912. Although the fighting with Ming loyalists continued until 1683, a legitimate dynasty was proclaimed in 1644 with a six-year-old Manchu boy on the throne.

General Wu San-kuei's decision to ally with aliens against Chinese sheds light on both the aims of the Manchu and the motives of the class from which Wu came. The Manchus had for years been assimilating Chinese administration, and understanding the uses of power, they respected the educated Chinese, who were given positions and prestige in the Manchu state. It was this understanding that no major changes would be made by the conqueror, while the conquered would assist in the ancient role of state servants, that led to the great peace of the next century and a half.

THE GREAT EMPERORS

The tranquility and prosperity of China from mid-seventeenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century was, of course, due to multiple causes, but prominent among them was the fact that of the Manchu emperors between 1662 and 1795, two were exceptionally able men who had extraordinarily long reigns: K'ang Hsi (1662–1722) and Ch'ien Lung (1736–1795), the first grand, the latter grandiose.

Actually, under the system, a Manchu emperor had to be exceptional. Although the Manchus made no fundamental changes, retained almost all Ming institutions, and claimed they were neither invaders nor usurpers but had come into China to avenge the Ming emperor against rebels and were themselves legitimate successors of the old Chin rule, they never lost the sense of being outsiders. They had to depend upon the Chinese to service government. To compensate for the lack of Manchus to run China, they so elevated the position of emperor that he had to work night and day supervising his Chinese officers of state. Furthermore, the inevitable effect of the expanding administrative system was a proportionate increase in government paperwork. Under these conditions any dynasty would have faltered unless its ruler was a superlative administrator.

The first great Manchu ruler was K'ang Hsi (b. 1654). Under the rule of this immensely hard-working man, Manchu power was stabilized. When he came to the throne, much of China south of the Yangtze was under the domination of the allied Chinese generals, led by Wu San-kuei. Wu had fought staunchly for the

Manchus for a generation against Ming loyalists in the west and in the south. In return, he and his confederate generals received something akin to feudatory authority in these regions. Their power increased ominously, and in 1673, K'ang Hsi ordered them to disband their independent forces. Wu San-kuei and his colleagues revolted against the order of this nineteen-year-old boy, and for a brief period coastal China and the south were lost to the regime. The feudatories eventually fell out among themselves, however. Great numbers of Chinese remained steadfast to the Manchus, and K'ang Hsi's armies were able and loyal. By 1677 Wu San-kuei was penned in Honan province, and later that year he fell ill and died. By 1681 the last remnants of revolt were scattered and the Manchus were firmly in control.

Under K'ang Hsi, China was at peace and prosperous. There was hardly an aspect of life, from agriculture to literature, that did not benefit from his attention throughout his reign, despite the illness of his later years. Near the end of his life, thinking back on the endless tedium of being an emperor, this wise and admirable ruler wrote:

> Having been on the throne for more than fifty years and almost at the age of eighty, I find that my country is peaceful and my people contented, though not exactly in an ideal condition of economic sufficiency and political satisfaction. I have worked all these long years carefully, patiently, and faithfully, as if for a day. The word "hard" is not enough to describe the nature of my work. Some emperors of the past died young; historical critics usually attribute their early death to luxuries and dissipation, even if they know the criticized monarchs were good emperors. This is academic cynicism. I want to vindicate the past emperors: in fact, they died of fatigue from state affairs. . . . A minister can enter or retire from government service as he pleases, but the emperor has no end to his work. . . . Some hold the theory that the emperor should attend to only very important affairs and leave the routine to the officials. I do not agree with this theory. For a tiny mistake in a little thing may give troubles to the whole country and a moment's carelessness may bring unhappiness to people of hundreds of generations. Therefore, whenever anything comes to me for decision, I always go over it very carefully. If I leave one or two things undone today, I will have that much more to be done

tomorrow. So I always clear it at once. And then whether the thing is important or not, I never handle it carelessly. Even a word in a mistaken position I cause to be corrected. It is my nature to be careful, hence I do not mean intentionally to reject the advice of "leaving the unimportant affairs in the hands of the officials."

I am physically strong since childhood. I could bend a fifteen-strength bow and shoot long and heavy arrows. I am excellent in military tactics. But, I never executed a single one of my people without justifiable cause. The suppression of the "three feudal princes" and the revolt in Northern Mongolia were results of my own tactics. The silver reserve in the treasury has never been used by me except for military campaigns and famine relief. Knowing that this money is the flesh and blood of my little people, I never wasted a single bit of the silver. Wherever I went, I never ordered special decorations or preparations for my visits. Each of my palaces is run with ten or twenty thousand taels of silver, which is less than one per cent of the annual expenditure on reconstruction of dams and dykes.

All the above statements form a true picture of my hard work and an expression of my sincerity. Whenever I read a petition of an old official for the privilege of retirement, I wept. You all have an opportunity to retire, but when can I have mine? I am now seventy-five.* A few white hairs have just appeared. Some advised me to have them dyed, but I declined their advice with a smile, because there have not been many emperors who could live long enough to have white hair.

If I am to have both my hair and my beard snow-white, will it not be romantic? But, alas! when I look back to my old colleagues who worked with me at the beginning of my reign, none can be found.†

The maturity of this dynasty and what may have been the greatest state and empire ever created began with Yung-cheng (1723–1735), the fourth son of K'ang Hsi, who came to power under somewhat murky circumstances, for his older brother had been designated successor. Conscious that both Chinese and Manchus viewed him with suspicion, he handled each group in

* K'ang Hsi was sixty-eight at his death. Either the translator or the emperor was in error as to his age at this writing.

† P. Hsieh, *The Government of China (1644–1911)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1925), pp. 33–34.

an appropriate fashion. He brought to an end the independent power held by his Manchu kinsmen over the military command of the Manchu armies. For their sons he set up a palace school, the goal of which was indoctrination in loyalty and obedience. For the Chinese Yung-cheng conducted an extremely efficient and honest government. He exercised strict surveillance of his ministers and lesser officials, punishing the slightest missteps and enforcing the laws fairly.

MANCHU GOVERNMENT, I

Because the Grand Secretariat proved to be hopelessly late and careless in matters of war policy (China was engaged in a serious struggle with the western Mongols of Central Asia), Yung-cheng created the most important state body of the Ch'ing dynasty, the Grand Council. Designed by him originally to handle military policy in swift and secret session, it ultimately succeeded the Grand Secretariat, which became a mere housekeeping organ. The Council had a varying number of members, none of whom had any special term of appointment. Because of the secrecy with which it operated and because it had daily access to the emperor, the Council considered all higher policy and administrative matters and soon became the most powerful organ of Ch'ing government. It was the chief and at times sole executive arm of what was, by the end of the seventeenth century, the most highly centralized of Chinese governments.

The best model of Manchu power and government would be that of an intricately balanced structure of local, provincial, and regional officials and controls, tied together by the civil-military bureaucracy and the whole within the grasp of the emperor. In this respect Ch'ing government was not unlike previous imperial Chinese governments, except that the emperor had far more power vested in himself, and the government was complicated by a larger population and a larger territory than ever before and by the racial mixture of Chinese and Manchu.

The metropolitan posts were judiciously apportioned between Chinese and Manchus. The provincial and regional government was in the hands of governors and governors-general appointed by the emperor. The provinces of Manchu China were divided into

the inner (or metropolitan) provinces and the outer provinces. The outer provinces each had a governor and were joined into regions under a governor-general.

The powers of the governors and the governors-general were very great. They could (subject to the imperial will) nominate or remove practically all provincial officials, execute the laws, administer justice, command the local military forces, and exercise the right and duty of remonstrance in behalf of their region or province against imperial laws or appointments. As to the prefects and magistrates appointed to handle local affairs, it should be noted that the empire contained over sixteen hundred basic administrative districts and that in running them the Manchus brought to fruition that dream of all Chinese governments, the surveillance and control of local populations. The villages were supervised by local people appointed and controlled by the central government through the hierarchy, which ran from governor-general to district magistrate. (There were some interesting safeguards built into the appointment of provincial and local officials. For a time, during the early Ch'ing period, new officials were given a practical internship on one of the boards of government before assignment. Magistrates were never sent to serve in their home provinces, in accord with the "law of avoidance." This was to help them—and the governed—to avoid nepotism and private pressures.) The goals set for the villages were peace, passivity, and a moderate prosperity. An edict of 1652 ordered that a school of sorts be provided for every village and that the schoolmaster encourage men in the virtues of duty, loyalty, and hard work.

BUREAUCRATIC CAPITALISM

The Manchus inherited a complex economy. Much less opposed to commercialism than their predecessors, they restored and nurtured the economy to the extent that very great private mercantile fortunes could be made. More so than in any previous time, there was, beginning in the late seventeenth century, nationwide buying and selling of manufactured and natural goods. This large-scale distributive trade, running from Yunnan to the Great Wall and from Fukien to Kansu, was based on manufactures (silk and cotton fabrics, porcelain, dyes) and commercial crops (cotton, sugar, indigo, grains, salt, and fish). Even the smallest villages

bought and sold some goods in the local distributing center. The extent of Chinese commerce did not escape European eyes, as this report by Jean-Baptiste DuHalde demonstrates:

> . . . the inland trade of China is so great that the commerce of all Europe is not to be compared therewith.*

The great accumulations of private capital, large even by present standards, were earned mostly by men acting as factors for government monopolies, and therefore the mercantile economy was still bureaucratically controlled, with government supervision of production and distribution. Men of great wealth continued to be at the mercy of the scholar-officials, whom they could patronize but hardly ignore, and in Ch'ing times the distinctions between social ranks became quite marked. Despite sumptuary legislation and the twenty-one defined degrees of noble rank and nine degrees of official rank, the commoner group (farmers, artisans, and merchants) was affectionately regarded by the Manchu regime as the producers of the national wealth. The outcome of this wise regard was a lack of rigidity in status. Many a merchant put his money into a degree for his sons, and many a scholar or official was proud of his commoner origins. There were, in fact, so many subcategories of rank and status and so much shifting among the categories that Manchu society, from the beginning, was fairly heterogeneous, despite the early Manchu attempts to impose both a government-ordered set of occupational categories and to enforce the hereditary caste system.

The major share of the national income went to the class that held office. Of degree-holders, many passed their lives in such tediums as district teaching or local magistracies, and not all were well off. A minority held significant office and had intimate connections with landholders or with business, through investment, marriage, or family and clan relationships. Therefore, the essential wealth of China was controlled by a monopoly within a monopoly. Like medieval knights, all degree-holders were social equals, and also like the knights, who ranged from great dukes to poor wanderers, degree-holders ranged from grand councilors to minor scribes, with corresponding incomes.

* Jean-Baptiste DuHalde, *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary* (London: 1741), Vol. I, p. 334.

It is interesting to note that the wealth of this era was, generally speaking, impermanent. One study has demonstrated the failure of large fortunes to persist for more than three generations, a pattern ascribed to three major factors: (1) the need for conspicuous consumption; (2) obligatory support of the family and the clan; (3) frequent massive "contributions" to the imperial treasury. To these should be added a fourth factor, the lack of investment opportunity for reserves of capital.

A more ancient method of accumulating fortunes was graft. The unparalleled Ch'ing example (and some believe the all-time Chinese) is that of Ho-shen, who became president of the Board of Revenue in 1780 and was a power on the other boards at the same time. His greed and insatiability were revealed after his death in 1799 (he was permitted to commit suicide). Operating through hand-picked appointments in the civil service, he had squeezed out a fortune estimated at eighty million ounces of silver, the amassing of which over two decades had led to serious unrest among exploited farmers and townsmen and to an irreparable weakness in the Manchu treasury.

MANCHU GOVERNMENT, II

For the most part, however, the Manchus enforced the most honest civil service in Chinese history. They not only modified the tax system but even made tax remissions. The Ming land tax categories, surveys, and quotas were maintained until 1712, when K'ang Hsi froze the land taxes on the "unalterable" base of the census of 1711. In 1725 the poor and landless were excused from taxes, and some temptation was removed from official life by raising the pay of the civil service. During K'ang Hsi's rule China enjoyed not only a benevolent and efficient government but also the highest standard of living in the world. This came about through K'ang Hsi's understanding that Confucian morality was all very well, but only strict enforcement of the laws made for honesty and prosperity. The unabashed Legalism of his administration earned the distaste of many Confucians whose influence waxed under his successor.

Ch'ien Lung (1736–1796) became emperor in peaceful, prosperous times. He was a most absolute ruler; his great ministers seldom dared to disagree with him and his lesser ministers never.

Lacking the solid virtues of a K'ang Hsi, he was nevertheless a great man. He was a conqueror who enjoyed the role and performed it well. There was not a decade of his reign without a major campaign or expedition of sorts—Burma, Formosa, Turkestan, Annam. He was also a generous patron of the arts and a prolific but middling poet and painter. Personally abstemious, hard-working, and responsible, he admired only one man, his grandfather K'ang Hsi, and although he retired from his office in 1796, he remained until his death in 1799 the dominant influence in China. He ruled China longer than any other emperor in history, and for all his costly campaigns, his extravagances in building, and his stifling of thought, he gave his country an unparalleled period of unity and order and splendor that never really faded from men's minds.

By the end of his life he was increasingly concerned with the imbalance between population and arable land, and he encouraged emigration from depressed regions to areas like Szechuan, Hopei, and Hunan. In the year of his retirement, rebellious secret societies were causing trouble in central China, and the empire he left his successor was great but exhibiting the familiar signs of dynastic decline—an increasingly slipshod civil service, a diminished treasury, and internal unrest.

Much of the unrest was due to sectarians. Secret brotherhoods like the Hung and the White Lotus had been savagely fought by the Manchus. The White Lotus was a millennial Buddhist-Taoist society dating from the fourth century, which, with its later offsprings, the Hung, had become an anti-Manchu, nationalistic revolutionary group. The Hung or Triad, masked as a beneficial and friendly society, had an extraordinarily wide membership. It staged revolts in 1774 and 1777 in Shantung, in 1796 in the west and south, and in 1807 and 1813 in the south. In 1813 another anti-Manchu society, the Sect of Heavenly Reason, attempted a mad assault on Peking itself. In 1815 the death penalty was decreed for all political or religious propaganda. The basic ethnic clash between Manchu and Chinese, which the dynasty had always feared and endeavored to conciliate or suppress, clearly threatened by the turn of the century, and from that time on no Manchu emperor was to be free of it.

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The Philosophical Challenge to Neo-Confucianism

Printing reached its highest development in the sixteenth century, with a plentitude of books, superb color reproduction, and the use of movable metal type. This technology may well have inspired the exciting literature and scholarship of the Ming-Ch'ing era, which were equal and in some respects superior to achievements of the past. In the field of abstract thought there was one final attempt to supersede the duality and pragmatism of Chu Hsi.

The School of Reason had been challenged in the twelfth century when it had been postulated that the world was not dual but one—"The universe is my mind and my mind is the universe"—and there had been a rejection of knowledge from books and investigation of the material universe. To attain good, man needed to rely only on the intuitive and reflective mind. This line of thinking was, in its own time, too close to Chan Buddhism to make an impression, especially when we remember that Chan Buddhism was in disfavor. But as the centuries passed there was a growing distaste for the excessive commentaries and heavy pedantry that marked the rationalist school of Chu Hsi.

WANG YANG-MING'S CHALLENGE

The greatest challenger of the official canons was the statesman-scholar-general Wang Yang-ming (Wang Shou-jen, 1472–1529). The son of a wealthy and highly placed family, he was an official of the Board of War and a successful man until he was exiled for supporting the impeachment of an emperor's favorite. In his exile, among the aborigines of the south, he turned to philosophy. He began with the same epistemological problem that bothered Berkeley, Locke, and Kant—How do we know the external world? The problem was best expressed by Kant when he asked, "How does it come about that the human mind so naturally understands what goes on outside it?" Wang arrived at a general conclusion somewhat like that of Berkeley: "Existence is either to perceive or to be perceived. . . . Whatever we see, feel, hear, or in any wise conceive or understand, remains as secure as ever and is as real as ever."

Wang hypothesized that mind is the ultimate reality and therefore the source of reality. Nothing exists outside of the mind. Therefore the mind's intuition and nothing else is the natural and infallible censor of right and wrong. This is a very modern and existential concept, for it alleges that good and evil exist only at the level of the individual being. The emphasis in Wang's school of the mind is on the meditative investigation. For the mind to recognize reason and attain the good, it needs only to be cultivated through self-discipline and meditation. Then, as one comes to intuit what is good, one will inevitably do good, because right knowledge without right action is worthless. Wang's bringing to an end the duality between knowing and doing meant that if mind was indeed the only reality, then right principles of ethical behavior exist *a priori* in the mind. In short, the abstract truth was relative.

This was a severe contradiction of the rationalist school, which held that the abstract truth of everything was invariable and that the physical world was real within itself. The thrust of this school was on the empirical investigation of things. Naturally a struggle arose between the two schools, a struggle that dominated the intellectual history of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While

Wang taught that intuitive knowledge must receive empirical expression—that is, knowledge is nothing unless it is put into practice—he leaves one puzzled as to how the mind originally can come to know itself, there being no distinction in his philosophy between the object of knowledge and the process of knowledge. The answer may be that the object is the process, and that it is impossible for the mind to distinguish between object/process.

Wang's posthumous followers misunderstood a good deal of what he had written, and his and their teaching came under increasing attack from those who stressed positivism and the virtue of knowing more and more. Many Ming scholars had accepted the premise that mind is reason, but they could not accept the corrolary idea of an undisciplined and untrammeled mind knowing the unknowable. They insisted that mind should come under the control of acquired knowledge. By the seventeenth century Wang's opponents had triumphed in their insistence upon the commitment to texts.

THE PRAGMATIC CHALLENGE

Even before the end of Ming there was opposition to the context and operation of Neo-Confucianism from more practical foes than Wang Yang-ming and his school. A number of the educated class, disaffected by the course of events at the court, joined the Tung-lin Academy—which dated from the Sung dynasty. Because of its large and powerful membership, it became a political force in the late Ming period, openly remonstrating against the machinations of favorites and eunuchs in the reigns of the last four emperors. Many of these men were proscribed from official life for their actions.

It became increasingly apparent that something was wrong with a political philosophy that produced, as the best possible, the helpless men and ineffectual regimes that marked the final century of Ming rule. With the advent of the Manchus, critical re-examination of Neo-Confucianism grew. It took an indirect form (under the Ch'ing any serious attack on orthodox teachings could mean impeachment) as a reappraisal of the historical texts to establish the true texts underlying Sung interpretation. Critics also attacked Buddhism and Taoism as having undue influence on

Confucianism. They attempted to unite education with life—that is, to show that philosophy was of value only as it contributed to make life (and government) better. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a massive effort to trim away the literary and rhetorical fat to get at the bone of learning. Men like Yen Yuan (1635–1704) and Tai Chen (1724–1777), who criticized the prevailing thought for failing to provide for competent men, were akin to Wang An-shih in their attempts at reform. They were interested in operational politics and opposed to the concept of government mandated to the superior man, believing that this led to self-righteousness, bigotry, and fanaticism. "Sympathy," said Tai Chen, "is sometimes expressed for men who are murdered in the name of Law. But who will sympathize with those men who are murdered in the name of Li?"* For these men, moral action was preferable to moral idealism.

Since many scholars of the seventeenth century were seeking to explain the collapse of the Ming dynasty, they turned to a critical study and revision of history. They formed no school but were simply joined together in their criticism of Neo-Confucianism as being too impractical a study and in their investigation of the sources of Confucianism. Their search led them to believe that the exact sources lay in the manuscripts of the Han era, and their study of the Han texts made the age of the Ch'ing dynasty one of great historical scholarship.

One reason they turned to the distant past lies in the reaction of the Manchu emperors to this kind of scholarship. While scholars were not as hostile to the Manchus as has been inferred by historians—many of the high Manchus were as cultivated and learned as their Chinese colleagues—yet there was a certain hostility against the "barbarians," partly motivated by resentment for having to do such things as learn the Manchu language and script. (The script, introduced in 1610 and artificial in nature, was devised to prevent the cultural subordination of the Manchus. It did not work. By the end of the dynasty even Manchu speech was rare.) Some of the literati refused to be bought by honors, posi-

* Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), Vol. II, p. 982.

tion, or money. They remained loyal to the memory of the Ming regime (for patriotic and not intellectual reasons) and stood apart from the official life of the Ch'ing dynasty. The Manchus, knowing this and suspecting that somewhere in the vast body of Chinese writing there might be materials in plenty for the enemies of their rule, exercised a stern literary censorship.

CENSORSHIP AND SCHOLARSHIP

Censorship was not a Manchu innovation. It began with the founder of the Ming dynasty, Hung-wu, an illiterate who had educated himself to read during his rebel campaigns. Any breach of the censorship in official and unofficial writing was punishable by flogging, execution, or exile Hung-wu was terribly sensitive to any hidden satire or irony, and indeed, the literati indulged themselves in jibes at the crude origins of his dynasty. Throughout Ming the throne tended to strike at literati who got out of line. The Manchus intensified and regularized such actions. Though they were outsiders and newcomers, they were more Confucian than the Confucians. They established controls that, in effect, interdicted scholars who opposed them or the things they stood for. The second Manchu emperor had three of the Confucian Classics censored because they asserted that a despot is due no loyalty.

Although the Manchus gained the favor and cooperation of the majority of learned men by supporting an orthodox program, the problem of the minority opposition remained. Ch'ien Lung tried to solve it by a harsh censorship of "treasonable" books. This began under the guise of collecting books from private libraries for an imperial collection. But the collectors were also inspectors empowered to demand, along with rare literary treasures, works inimical to the dynasty. The emperor himself decreed the following:

EDICT URGING INCREASED ACTIVITY IN THE SEARCH FOR BOOKS: DATED THE 19TH DAY OF THE INTERCALARY 6TH MOON, 3RD YEAR OF CH'IEN-LUNG [August 11, 1778]

I have already repeatedly addressed the governors-general and governors of the various provinces on the question of finding and collecting books of treasonable tendencies, for delivery to the capital for destruction by fire. The censorable volumes which

have been discovered by the aforesaid provinces, though they have been set up in numerous batches, do not represent, I fancy, all; some must yet remain, possibly in very poor homes in the remote countryside where the inhabitants had no chance of hearing my commands. If this time additional volumes are delivered my former promise will stand; it will not incriminate [the owners]. If they present none, and later evidence comes to light, then they cannot avoid the penalty. You must make the purpose of this mandate clear to the people. Order them to investigate their bookcases with the utmost care, that every [nefarious volume] may be cleared from them. This will cause men's hearts to be made straight and their spirits loyal.

I am once more causing this edict to be addressed to the highest officials of the various provinces. They must carry out its provisions with true zeal; let there be no loopholes in their management; let them impress upon their subordinates the necessity of delegating responsible men to carry out the inquisition meticulously. Let no wicked small functionaries be permitted to bring trouble by making this a pretext for extorting demands.

Let this edict be dispatched for the information of the governors-general and governors of the provinces. Respect this![*]

In 1783 an index of prohibited works was set up, and provincial authorities were ordered to search them out and send them to Peking for destruction. Emperor Ch'ien Lung said, "I want the books, not to do harm to their owners, but to seek out the defects in the books themselves," yet he left no doubt of the penalities.

The long-range results of this censorship were considerable. Thousands of works were destroyed or expurgated, many authors held themselves in check, and a blank was created in Chinese history, for the two centuries preceding Ch'ien Lung yield only fragmentary materials.

This, then, is why, throughout the Ch'ing period, there was a steady dehumanization of Confucian teaching and why, from the late seventeenth century onward, scholars strove to return to the simple, accurate teaching of the past, with a consequent emphasis on historiography, historical criticism, and philology. Their skepticism is shown by the following famous anecdote:

[*] L. Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien Lung* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1935), p. 169.

"But," the boy asked his tutor, "how do we know that this is true?"

"Master Chu Hsi said so," answered the unsuspecting pedagogue.

"When did Master Chu live?"

"In the Sung dynasty."

"When did Master K'ung and Master Tseng live?"

"In the Chou dynasty."

"How many years intervened between the two dynasties?"

"Two thousand years."

"Then how could Master Chu know what happened two thousand years ago?"*

Both the Ming and the Manchu periods witnessed great revivals of past knowledge and a peak of achievement in such specialized studies as philology, historical geography, and textual studies. Even a mere catalogue of scholarly ventures would fill pages. The major work of the age was the Great Encyclopedic Collection ordered by Yung-lo. Compiled between 1403 and 1408, its 11,095 volumes represented the sum of all things known by the Chinese at the time. Too big to print, it was done in only three manuscript copies. The last was destroyed in 1860 in the sack of Peking by Anglo-French troops.

The words of great Ch'ing scholars are the first rumblings of the terrible storms that broke over China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These men were convinced that intellectual and philosophic fraud of a vast nature had been practiced in the name of antiquity and its teachings. They profoundly distrusted metaphysics and opted for efficient, practical, decentralized, and concerned government. To their contribution should be added that of the scholar Wang Fu-chih (1619–1692), one of the few Chinese thinkers to conceive of China in strongly nationalistic terms. The state was organized not only for the benefit of the people, he believed, but also for the preservation of the Chinese race.

* W. Liu, *A Short History of Confucian Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 177.

THE LAST AND GREATEST EMPIRE

During the first century of the Ming dynasty, the Chinese relentlessly struggled with the seemingly indestructible Mongols and temporarily restored Chinese dominion over the old buffer areas of Korea, Manchuria, and Annam, and sent great naval expeditions as far as East African waters. In accord with his respect for the past, Hung-wu tried to make China the center of the world and through diplomatic means to make the emperor the center of China. He worked seriously to maintain peace and friendship with his neighbors, as is clear in this statement:

> Since they [the neighboring countries] do not start trouble, it will be unfortunate if we mobilize our forces to subjugate them. I fear that my descendants, in times to come, may attempt, relying on the wealth and power of China, to demonstrate a temporary military power and may, without reason, raise armies thus causing the death of many. They must heed this and must refrain from so doing.*

This policy was successful with the states of Southeast Asia and Korea, but not at all so with the Mongols of the north and Central Asia.

The Ming was a profoundly Chinese house, and its armies were the manifest weapon of a long hatred of the Mongols. When Toghan-timur fled to Shang-tu, the army of Chu Yüan-chang pursued him and drove him still farther, but even past the Great Wall the Mongols were a danger. In 1372 the Chinese marched as far as the Kerulen River but were turned back. It was not until 1388 that a large Chinese force reached Karakorum, the Mongol capital, and destroyed the city, but still the Mongols threatened. They retreated westward into the Altai ranges, and then as the Chinese moved back into China, the Mongols regrouped and came back. The vast spaces of Inner Asia made it impossible to destroy any mobile cavalry force, which could always retreat beyond the range of an enemy.

Eventually the Mongols split into contending factions. In 1408 their eastern tribes reappeared along the Kerulen River, and in

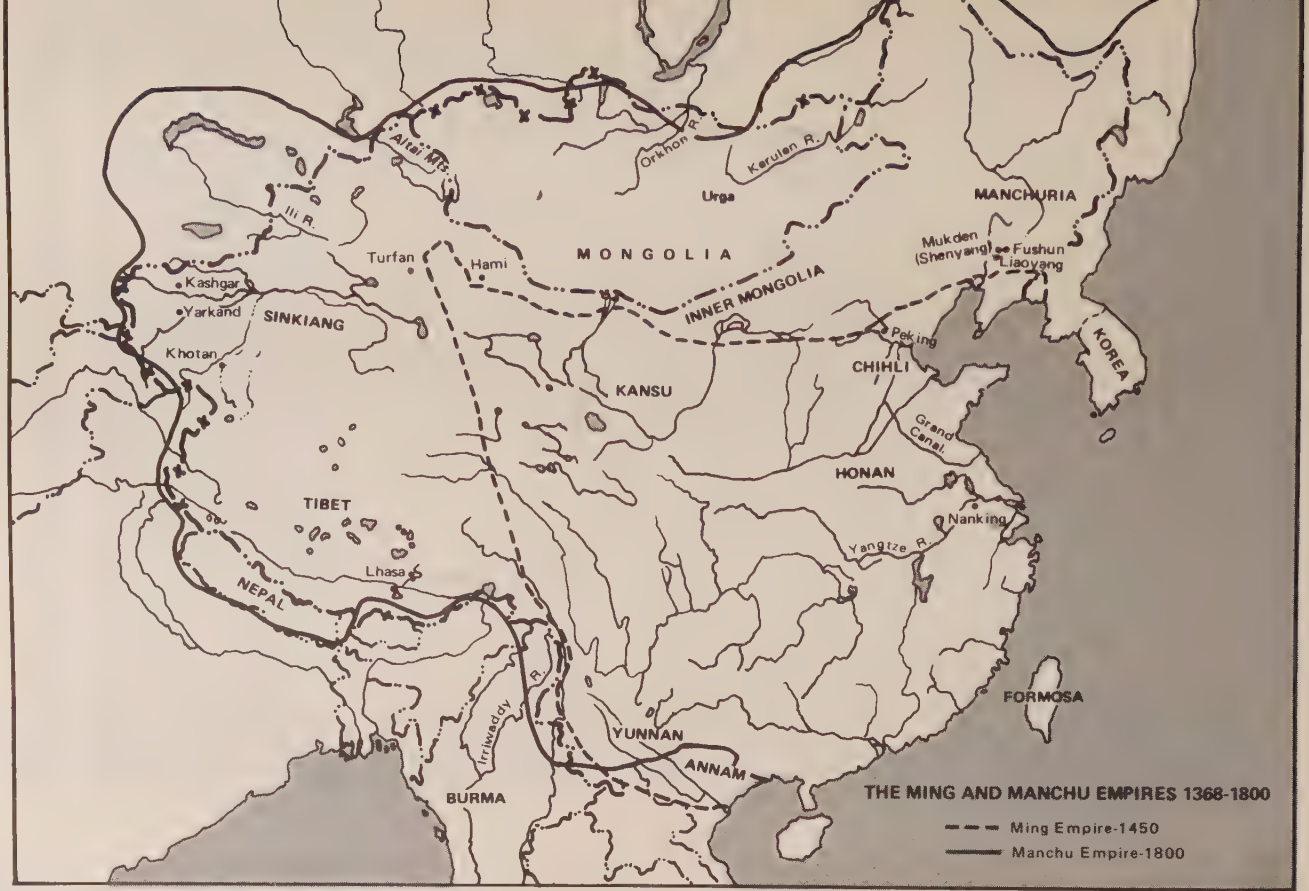
* Mao Yüan-i, *Wu-pei Chih,* Chüan 223, p. 42.

1410 Yung-lo surprised them along the Onon and badly hurt them. The western tribes (the Kalmucks) and their powerful sub-branch, the Djungars, remained in the Ili-Altai regions. Internal strife among the eastern Mongols allowed Peking to exercise a certain control over them by recognizing as titular Mongol leader the faction it could best deal with. However, the extraordinary difficulty of inflicting defeat on these people was dramatized in 1449, when the eastern Mongols regrouped, raided into China past the Great Wall, defeated a Chinese army north of Peking, and captured the emperor. The Mongols were unable to exploit this victory, but they did move their capital back into the Ordos region, marking the beginning of centuries of intermittent heavy border fighting, which helped ultimately to bleed the Ming to death.

During the first years of the fifteenth century China had unwittingly been spared a major disaster when the great Tamerlane died, in February 1405. The ruler of the world as far as he knew, Tamerlane had been angered when Peking, innocently regarding him as just another Mongol ruler in western Asia, sent him a formal demand for tribute. In his rage at the insult, Tamerlane assembled a vast army at Samarkand, designed to cross the desert and invade China, but died before he reached the goal.

Ming China never did re-establish the control of Central Asia that T'ang had achieved, but Ming traders and envoys traveled to the cities and oases of Central Asia whose names can still invoke a spell—Kashgar, Khotan, Bokhara, Tashkent, Samarkand, Herat, Isfahan, Shiraz. The lands of Central Asia remained under the rule of Tamerlane's successors and their successors, the Uzbegs. The great Eurasian land route was no longer dominated by either Chinese or Mongol, which seems to have discouraged Western overland travelers from the last years of the Yüan dynasty until 1607, when Benedict Goes traveled from India through Turkestan to China, where he died in Suchow, some three hundred years after Marco Polo visited that city.

It is possible that the shrinkage of the overland trade prompted the great sea-expeditions launched by Yung-lo. Kublai Khan's sea ventures had ruined the Chinese naval and mercantile fleets. Hung-wu had rebuilt them. In 1405 the first series of expeditionary voyages began, which, until they stopped abruptly in


Altai Mts.
Orkhon R.
Kerulen R.
Urga
MANCHURIA
Ili R.
Turfan
Hami
MONGOLIA
Mukden (Shenyang)
Fushun
Liaoyang
Kashgar
Yarkand
SINKIANG
INNER MONGOLIA
Peking
KOREA
Khotan
KANSU
CHIHLI
Grand Canal
HONAN
TIBET
Nanking
Yangtze R.
Lhasa
NEPAL
FORMOSA
Irrawaddy R.
YUNNAN
ANNAM
BURMA
THE MING AND MANCHU EMPIRES 1368-1800
Ming Empire-1450
Manchu Empire-1800

1430, carried great armies of Chinese men in the largest ships of their time, to Ormuz on the Persian Gulf, Jidda on the Red Sea, Mogadiscio on the East African Coast, as well as Java, Sumatra, Malacca, and Palembang, much closer to home. The inexplicable withdrawal of this powerful naval force after the death of Yung-lo, and the confining of Chinese vessels to coastal waters, marks the beginning of an official policy of isolation. As L. Goodrich notes, "the subjects of a China which had known all the peoples of Asia were soon forbidden to leave home or to communicate with foreigners."* This policy paralleled increasing absolutism at court and the intention that no military or naval commander should create a power countervailing that of Peking. Yet this can be only one of the reasons why, after Yung-lo, Ming became the weakest military dynasty in Chinese history. The singular recruitment and organization of the army invited eventual disaster. The abandonment of the navy ensured it.

No doubt these decisions were motivated by an underlying xenophobia, arising from China's experiences with the Mongols and swollen by cultural pride, which resulted not only in isolation but in such domestic policies as making Neo-Confucianism a state doctrine in the early sixteenth century. While this is understandable, it is not clear why the navy should have been abandoned when the entire China coast was vulnerable to buccaneering attacks, unless one accepts the theory that this maritime policy of the mid-fifteenth century represents a basic and hitherto unrealized national weakness. In the fourteenth century the outbreak of a long and destructive civil war in Japan had ended strong government there and unleashed Japanese piracy against the Korean and Chinese coasts. The numerous pirates, based on the ports of Kyushu and the Inland Sea, were well organized and fierce fighters. Piracy in Japan became as respected a profession as in Elizabethan England. Hung-wu, having failed to check the attacks by diplomacy, built coastal defenses against them. This had little effect, however, partly because many of the "Japanese" pirates were Chinese. The great Shogun Yoshimitsu succeeded in sup-

* L. Goodrich, *A Short History of the Chinese People*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harpers, 1958), p. 195.

pressing the pirates for a time, but after his death in 1408 the raids resumed and continued through most of the sixteenth century. The best the Ming could do was to abandon coastal areas and transfer the populations inland. The coast was not secured until 1619, when the isolationist Tokugawa government took over Japan. But by this time it made no essential difference for the Ming dynasty. The Korean campaigns of 1592–1593 and 1597–1598 had consumed too many forces, and the Manchu campaigns in the northeast in the early seventeenth century used up the remainder. With the outbreak of rebellion and the defection of Wu San-kuei, the responsibility for a Chinese empire once again rested in the hands of a non-Chinese dynasty.

The Ch'ing dynasty, inherently sensitive to military power, created the last great Chinese empire in Asia. The regime had at its disposal an efficient cavalry army backed by large Chinese reserves. At the outset there were twenty-four banners or corps—eight Manchu, eight Mongol, and eight Chinese—each known by a distinctive flag and consisting of not only the fighting men but also their families. The Manchus were the original and most favored of the banners, and the whole organization is sometimes referred to merely as the Eight Banners. These banners were mounted bowmen garrisoned in the provinces, along the frontiers, and particularly around Peking. They were backed by the reserve Green Standard Army, a purely Chinese force recruited from volunteers who, between campaigns, were stationed in small garrisons among the provinces to be used as an internal police force by governors and viceroys. The bannermen served directly under the emperor.

Their old enemies, the Mongols, had long feared that if the Manchus ever came to control China, their next step would be to reach out for Mongolia. They were correct. It took the Manchus about one century to take over Inner Mongolia and exercise a control over Outer Mongolia, and a further fifty years to reassert Chinese hegemony over much of Central Asia, Tibet, and Annam, and to reach into Burma and Nepal. The struggle for Mongolia and Central Asia eventually brought China into confrontation with Russia.

Manchu control of the Mongols was related to control of

Tibet. In the sixteenth century the reappearance of Lama Buddhism among the Mongols and its rapid spread (their leaders believed that it would postpone the adoption of Chinese culture) had led to a good deal of ecclesiastical politics among various Mongol groups, each contending to make its own men high religious dignitaries. It became clear to K'ang Hsi, who had a serious border problem on his hands, that whoever controlled the Lama church could control the Mongols. This meant control of the Living Buddha at Lhasa, for the Mongols regarded Lhasa as the fountainhead of their belief, while Lhasa regarded the Mongols as protectors of the faith. If Peking could command this source of Mongol theocratic power, it could control not only the Mongols but the trade routes across Central Asia.

Before Tibet could be brought under control, however, the routes into it had to be absolutely secured by Chinese military power. Between 1690 and 1697 Chinese garrisons were placed in Urga, Hami, and Turfan, and the passes into Tibet were occupied. (As early as 1661 the flanks of the passes had been cleared by a Chinese army, which had driven as far into Burma as thirty miles from Mandalay.) In 1705 Peking contrived to make their own man the secular regent of Tibet, and the following year the Living Buddha was murdered. China then tried to get its candidate elected, but the Tibetans revolted, and with Mongol help by 1717 they had driven the Chinese out of Tibet. Apart from striking a blow at Peking's pride, the Tibetan victory seemed to presage an increasing independence and perhaps a new state among the Mongols. In 1720 a new Chinese army crossed the passes into Tibet, seized Lhasa, and made a Chinese lackey the head of the Yellow Church, the Lama Buddhist church. That same year the office of a Chinese resident was established in Tibet.

For the next seventy years there were intermittent rebellions in Tibet against Chinese control, aided from time to time by outsiders. Most serious were the rebellions supported by Burma and Nepal, which provoked Chinese expeditions against these countries. In 1765 and again in 1768–1769 Chinese armies fought in Burma along the Irriwaddy River, and in 1792 a Chinese army fought in Nepal. So seriously did Peking take the matter of the Lama church that after 1792 it ordered that all ecclesiastical posts

in Mongolia and Tibet receive investiture from Peking. To a greater or lesser extent Tibet remained under Chinese control from 1792 to 1904, when the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and the new British control to place himself under the protection of the Russian tsar.

During the eighteenth century, Chinese emigration to Central Asia was encouraged, and in 1759, when Yarkand, Kashgar, and Khotan were added to China's domain, they were organized into a territory called the New Dominion or Sinkiang. When one considers the extent of Sinkiang, Mongolia, Tibet, and the Manchurian homeland together with Chinese control of the Annamese and Burmese frontiers and the very close Chinese control over the foreign relations of Korea, it is clear that by the end of the eighteenth century the Manchus had pieced together the largest land empire in Chinese history. They had incorporated into it three vast territories (Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, Manchuria) that previous dynasties had only nominally controlled, and they had made the land frontiers of China as safe as they had ever been. Unfortunately the last and final threat to the integrity of the empire and the state came not by land but from the abandoned sea frontier.

✿ *RETROSPECT*

As Goodrich once noted, the Ming received a "bad press" from succeeding generations of historians on the grounds that theirs was an era of intellectual rigidity and drift and decay in government. Although the Ming period can be credited with great developments in government, the economy, education, and literature, Chinese historians disapproved of the enormous concentration of power in the hands of the emperor and his staff, and deeply resented the first emperor's revisions of the examination system, designed to test less for erudition than for ability. Many highly educated men felt more comfortable with the learning of the past than with contemporary matters. Scholars of the Ming (and the Ch'ing) lived during times when the development and spread of

printing had made available more diverse and broader knowledge than at any previous time, and the attractions of bookishness, as well as their distaste for the regime, caused many to retreat to an elite life of study. Some of this retreat was profitable, as in the case of the "Han school," with its emphasis on exact sources, but much of it was not. Finally, the Ming was assumed to have failed its trust in not preventing the Manchu conquest. As to the alien Manchus, they remained under indictment, as it were, from the time of their accession, a view intensified by the tragic history of China in the last seventy years of the dynasty.

Yet these centuries are now being seen as a period rich in diversity and creativity of thought. Fresh insights into the era from the mid-fourteenth century to the end of the eighteenth are revealing how much these centuries added to the economic, governmental, intellectual, and imperial aspects of China. Another factor of great importance now coming to light is that from 1385 to 1790 the Chinese were beset with problems of size unknown to previous Chinese governments.

The urbanization of China began in Sung times, continued during Ming, and flourished in Ch'ing, when more cities were built and more provinces created than during any previous dynasty. To the roll of cities were added the great cities Nanking and Peking and many smaller cities in the southwest, southeast, and northeast. The re-creation of the empire led to the building of roads and the establishment of military colonies on an unprecedented scale. At the height of the Manchu empire, Chinese forces garrisoned and governed a frontier as far-flung as the Himalayas, the T'ien-shan, Lake Balkhash, and the Amur River.

During these centuries population rose not only in the Yangtze valley and along the south coast but in the north as well. According to P. T. Ho, the population of China in 1600 was about 150 million, by 1850 about 430 million. Although the area under cultivation, the diversification of agriculture, and the production of food increased remarkably, the sheer size of the population and of the commercial and agricultural economy it required brought new problems to the government, which sought solutions through despotism. The growth of China developed opportunities for official corruption, and during this period, as L. S. Yang observes, "the

bureaucratic machine had become so complicated that the functioning at every joint required oiling with silver."*

Yet all of it—the despotism, the corruption, the alienation of scholars, the problems of cities, the balancing of population with food and land, the responsibility of a great frontier—had in its way occurred before and was happening within the familiar ambiance of the Chinese tradition. What was to prove completely new and intractable was the approach of a civilization whose values and goals were completely antithetical to China's. The West's great thrust into China (and indeed all of eastern and southeastern Asia) began in force in the first third of the nineteenth century, exactly when the internal problems of China were becoming so critical that even a stronger dynasty than the later Ch'ing would have been in difficulty. Neither the dynasty nor traditional China could survive both the internal and external crisis. The year of the death of Ch'ien Lung, 1795, the last truly great Chinese emperor ruling a truly great state, is a fitting date with which to close our account of the Chinese empire.

* L. S. Yang, "Economic Aspects of Public Works in Imperial China," *Excursions in Sinology*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies, XXIV (1969), p. 230.

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The Chinese Empire

JOHN A. HARRISON

With this volume, a companion to the widely used *China Since 1800,* John A. Harrison completes his short history of China, a concise treatment of the subject designed for students and the general reader. The present volume covers the rich sweep of history that extends from China's origins in Neolithic times to the end of the eighteenth century. It discusses the formation of the first truly Chinese culture, circa 1000 B.C.; the unification of China; the age of the great philosophers—Confucius, Mencius, and Hsün-tzu; the founding of the imperial state and expansion of the empire; the development of science and technology; and the maturation of Chinese civilization. The survey leaves China on the eve of the modern era, under its Manchu conquerors, in command of the largest land empire ever known, but vulnerable to the threat that will come by sea from the West in the next century.

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